THE RETURN OF PETER GRIMM

DAVID BELASCO

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To Holbrook Blatt
From Mrs Van Pelt.

The Return of Peter Grimm

"Sleep well," said Peter Grimm. "I wish you the very pleasantest of dreams a boy could have in *this* world"

(*page* 321)

The Return of Peter Grimm

NOVELISED FROM THE PLAY

BY

DAVID BELASCO

ILLUSTRATIONS BY

JOHN RAE

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"Sleep well," said Peter Grimm. "I wish you the very pleasantest of dreams a boy could have in *this* world" (page 321) . *Frontispiece*

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The Return of Peter Grimm

CHAPTER I

A MAN AND A MAID

THE train drew to a halt at the Junction. There was a fine jolt that ran the length of the cars, followed by a clank of couplings and a half-intelligible call from the conductor.

The passengers,—dusty, jaded, crossly annoyed at the need of changing cars,—gathered up their luggage and filed out onto the bare, roofless station platform. There, after a look down the long converging rails in vain hope of sighting the train they were to take, they fell to glancing about the cheerless station environs.

Far away were rolling hills, upland fields of wind-swept wheat, cool, dark stretches of woodland. But around the station were areas of ill-kept lots, with here and there a jerry-built cottage, sadly in need of shoring, and bereft of paint. Across the road on one side stood the general store with its clump of porch-step loafers and its windows full of gaudy advertisements. To the side, and parallel with the tracks,

sprawled a huge, weather-buffeted signboard that read:

"Grimm's Botanical Gardens and Nurseries.
1 Mile."

The passengers eyed the half-defaced lettering, pessimistically. But almost at once they received a far pleasanter reminder of the botanical gardens. A boy, flushed with running, and evidently distressed at being late, pattered up the road and onto the platform. From one of his fragile arms hung a great basket. The lid had fallen aside and showed the basket piled to the brim with fresh flowers.

Hurrying to the nearest passenger—an obese travelling man who mopped a very red face,—the boy timidly held a Gloire de Dijon rose up to him and recited with parrot-like glibness:

"With the compliments of Peter Grimm."

The fat man half unconsciously took the rose from the little hand and stood looking as though in dire doubt what to do with it. The boy did not help him out. Already he had moved on to the next passenger,—this time a man of clerical bearing and suspiciously vivid nose,—and handed him a gleaming Madonna lily.

"With the compliments of Peter Grimm," he announced, passing on to the next.

And so on down the bunched line of waiting men and women the lad made his way. In front of each, he paused, presented a flower taken at random from the basket, recited his droning formula, and passed on.

The fat travelling man stared stupidly at his rose. Then he looked about him, half shamefacedly and in wonder.

"What in blazes——?" he began.

"You must be a stranger in this part of the state," volunteered a big young fellow, who had just come out of the waiting-room. "Did you never hear of the flower-giving at the Junction?"

"No. What's the idea? Is it done on a bet? Or is it an 'ad' for the man on the sign over there?"

"Neither. It has been Peter Grimm's custom for twenty years or more. Ever since I first knew him."

"And it isn't an ad?"

"No," was the enigmatic answer as the big young man moved off in the wake of the lad. "It's Peter Grimm."

The boy meanwhile had reached the last of the

passengers. She was middle-aged and motherly-looking. She peered down at him with more than common interest as he went through his pat little presentation formula. A psychologist would have gathered much from the lad's tense, flushed face and in the oddly strained look of the big blue eyes. To this woman, he was only a thin, lonely looking youngster, whose face held an unconscious appeal that she answered without reading it.

"I am very much obliged to Mr. Peter Grimm for sending me this lovely flower," she said, a little patronisingly, as she sniffed at the half-opened Killarney rose she held.

"You need not be," answered the boy. "He didn't really send it to you. In fact, I'm quite sure he never even heard of you. He just sent it because he is good and because——"

"Because he loves flowers," suggested the woman as the boy hesitated.

"No," corrected the boy, in his gentle, old-fashioned diction, wherein lurked the faintest trace of foreign accent, "I never heard him say anything about loving flowers. But I know the flowers love him."

"What?"

"You see, they grow for him as they don't grow for any one else. *Much* better I am sure," he added a little bitterly, "than they will ever grow for Frederik. I don't think flowers love Frederik."

"What queer ideas you have!" she laughed, embarrassed at his quiet statement of facts that seemed to her absurd. "Are you Mr. Grimm's son?"

"No, ma'am. He is not married. I don't think he has any sons at all. I'm Anne Marie's son."

"Anne Marie? Anne Marie—what?"

"Just Anne Marie. I'm Willem, you know."

"William?"

"No, ma'am. Willem."

"Willem Grimm?"

"No, ma'am. Anne Marie's Willem. I—Oh, Mr. Hartmann!" he broke off, catching sight of the big young man who drew near, "Mynheer Peter said you'd be on this train. Now I can have some one to walk back with."

Slipping his hand into Hartmann's, Willem turned his back on the platformful of perspiring beneficiaries and, together, the two struck off down the yellow, dusty road toward the double row of

giant elms that marked the beginning of the village street.

William shuffled in high contentment alongside his big companion. And as he walked, he stole upward and sidelong glances of furtive hero worship at the tall, plainly clad figure. Jim Hartmann was of a build and aspect to rouse such worship in the frail little fellow. He had the shoulders, the chest girth, the stride of an athlete, tempered by the slight roundness of those same shoulders, the non-expansiveness of chest, and the heavy tread of the large man whose strength and physique have been acquired at manual labour instead of in athletics. A figure more common east of the Atlantic than in America.

His dark suit was neat and fitted honestly well. But it was palpably not the suit of a man whose father had worn custom-made clothes or whose own earlier youth had been blessed with such garments. Yet there was a breezy, staunch outdoorness about the whole man that reminded one of a breath of mountain air in a close room and left half unnoticed the details of costume and bearing.

"Weren't you glad to get away from New York City?" queried the boy as they came into

the elm shade of Grimm Manor's one real street. "A week is an awful long time to be away from here."

"You bet it is. You're a lucky chap to be able to stay at Grimm Manor all the time instead of being sent here, there, and everywhere on business."

"I shouldn't like that," assented the boy; "I think people would be very liable of losing their way. I wonder if Mynheer Peter will send me 'here, there, and everywhere on business' when I'm older."

"Perhaps," agreed Hartmann, catching the slight note of wistfulness in Willem's voice. "You're beginning the way I began. It wasn't more than a week after my father got his gardening job with Mr. Grimm that I used to be sent up to meet the trains with a basket of flowers and 'the compliments of Peter Grimm.' It seems more like yesterday than eighteen years ago."

"I'm glad you're back from New York City," said the boy, circling back to the conversation's starting-point. "It's been rather lonely. Mynheer Peter has been so busy. And Frederik——"

"Well," queried Jim as the boy checked himself and looked nervously behind him, "what

about Frederik? And why do you always look like that when you speak of him?"

"Like what?"

"As if you were afraid some one would slap you. Is Frederik ever unkind to you?"

"No," denied the boy, in scared haste. "No, he never is. He—he doesn't notice me at all. That's what I was going to say. He doesn't seem to care to. But he likes to be with Kathrien, I think. Yes, I'm sure he does. I think Kathrien missed you, too, Mr. Hartmann."

The big man grew of a sudden vaguely embarrassed. He cast back along the trail of the talk for some divergent path, and found one.

"Yes," he said, "it's good to be back from New York. The city always seems to cramp me and make it hard for me to breathe. The pavements hurt my feet and I have a silly feeling as though the skyscrapers were going to topple inward."

He was talking to himself rather than to the boy. But Willem rejoined sympathetically:

"I don't like New York City either."

"You, why you surely can't remember when you used to live there?"

The boy's fair brow creased in an effort of memory.

"Sometimes," he hesitated, "I can. And sometimes I don't seem able to. But I remember Anne Marie. She cried."

"How is Mynheer Peter?" demanded Hartmann with galvanic suddenness. "And how are that last lot of Madonna lilies coming on? They ought to be——"

"Sometimes," went on the boy, still following his own line of thought and oblivious of the interruption, "sometimes I wonder why she cried. Sometimes for a minute or two—mostly at night, when I'm nearly asleep—I seem to remember why. But I always forget. Mr. Hartmann, did you see Anne Marie when you were in New York City?"

"No, of course not. How are Lad and Rex and Paddy? And do they still dig for moles in the flower-beds? Or did the dose of red pepper my father scattered over the beds cure them of digging?"

"I wonder," observed Willem, "why everybody always talks about everything else when I want to talk about Anne Marie. And if other fellows' mothers come to see them and live with them, why doesn't Anne Marie come and live

with me? I asked Oom Peter once and he said——"

"I've got to leave you now and hurry over to Mynheer Grimm's office with my report," broke in Hartmann. "My train was a little late anyhow and you know how he hates to be kept waiting."

They had entered a wide gateway and had come from suburban America, at a step, into rural Holland. The prim gravelled drive led between acres of prosaically regular flower-beds, flanked on one side by a domed green house and on the other by a creaking Dutch windmill with weather-browned sails.

Straight ahead and absurdly near the road for a country house that boasted so much land about it, was the stone and yellow stucco cottage that for centuries had sheltered successive generations of Grimms. Painfully neat, unpicturesquely ugly, the house stood among its great oaks. It did not nestle among them. It stood. As well expect a breadth of starched brown holland to nestle. To deprive the abode of any lingering taint of picturesqueness, a blue and white signboard, thirty feet long, stretching between it and the main street, flashed to all the passing world the news that this

was the headquarters of the celebrated "Grimm's Botanical Gardens and Nurseries."

The interior of the house was as delightful as its outside was hideous. Here, neatness raised to the *n*th power chanced to strike the keynote of a certain beauty. The big living-room, with its stairway leading to the bedroom gallery above, was a repository of curios that would have set an antiquary mad. From the ancient clock to the priceless old blue china, three-fourths of the room's appointments might have served to deck a Holland museum. The remaining fourth contained such articles as a glaringly modern telephone on a nondescript desk, and a compromise between old and new in the shape of a square piano in the bay window, an ancient table. And several patently twentieth century articles helped still further to rob the place of any harmony or unison in effect.

An altogether charming Dutch maiden was dusting, and occasionally stopping to restore some slightly disarranged article to its mathematically neat position. In her blue Dutch cap, her blue delft gown, and white kerchief, she seemed to have danced down out of the past to strike the one note of vivid life in all that sombre-furnished place.

She paused in the sweep of sunshine that poured through the muslin-curtained bay window. A step had sounded in the passage leading from the rear of the house;—a step she evidently knew. For the full young lips broke into an involuntary smile of expectancy, while the big eyes grew all at once eager and happy. Jim Hartmann, a pen behind his ear, a bundle of mail in his hand, came into the room. He had reached the desk and deposited his packet there before he caught sight of her. Then, wide-eyed, silent, tense, he halted, gazing at the sunshine-bathed figure in the window embrasure. For an instant neither of them spoke. It was the girl who broke the silence, her voice charged with a strange shyness.

"Good-morning, James," she said primly.

"Good-morning, Miss Katie," he answered mechanically, his eyes still wide with the loveliness of the sun-kissed face that so suddenly broke in upon his workaday routine.

"I wondered if you'd gotten back yet," she continued, seeming to hunt industriously for a phrase of sufficiently meaningless decorum.

"I got back ten minutes ago. I reported to Mr. Grimm and brought the morning mail in here to look over for him. It seems strange to find the

day so far advanced at this hour," he went on, talking at random. "After a week in New York, where no one thinks of doing business before nine in the morning, it's like coming into another world to be back here where the day's work begins at five."

He sat down, pleasantly regardless of the fact that she was still standing, and began to open and sort the letters before him. The girl noticed that his big hands fumbled at the unfamiliar task. But she noticed far more keenly the strength and massive shapeliness of the hands themselves.

"Do you like being secretary?" she queried.

"Yes, in a way. I've walked 'outside' in the gardens and nurseries so many years, it seems queer to be penned up indoors and have to scribble letters and open mail. But I'd sooner shovel dirt than not be here at all. I couldn't last a month at a job where there wasn't gardening going on all around me and where I couldn't sneak off once in a while and do a bit of it myself."

"That's the way I feel," she said simply, "though I never thought to put it in words before. I must live where things are growing. Where, every time I look out of the window, I can see orchards and shrubs and hothouses. Oh, it's all

so beautiful! And, James, our orchids this season —but I forgot. You don't care for orchids."

"They're pretty enough, I suppose," vouchsafed Hartmann. "But the big men in the business are doing wonderful things with potatoes these days. And look at what Father Burbank's done in creating an edible cactus! Sometimes it makes me feel bitter when I think what I might have done with vegetables if I hadn't squandered so much God-given time studying Greek."

"But——"

"Oh, yes. It made a hit with father to have me study a lot of things that would only help a college professor. He's worked in the dirt, in overalls, all his life. And like most people who never had one, he sets a crazy value on so-called 'education.' But all this can't interest you," he finished ruefully.

"It *does* interest me. You know it does. But there's something I'd like to say to you if you won't be angry."

"At *you?* Why——"

"It's this: I want you so much to get on. Why won't you try harder to—to please Uncle Peter?"

"I do try. I'm square with him. That's the trouble. That's why I don't make more of a hit.

He asks me my ' honest opinion ' about something or other. I give it. Then he blows up."

" But if you'd try to be more tactful——"

" You said that once before to me, Miss Katie. I asked you what ' tactful ' meant. And when you told me——"

" When I told you, you said it was ' just a fancy name for being hypocritical.' But it isn't, a bit. Can't you try not to be quite so—so——? "

" Cranky? "

" No, blunt. It will smooth things over so much with Uncle Peter. He's really the gentlest, dearest——"

" I've noticed it," said Hartmann drily. " But I'll try if you want me to. I promise."

" Thank you," she answered.

And, perhaps to seal the pledge, their hands met. The sealing of a pledge is not a matter to slur over with careless haste, but requires due time. And it was but natural that the handclasp should be symbolic of that deliberation. Indeed, it is hard to say just how long his big hand and her little one might have remained clasped together had inclination been allowed to prevail. But, as usual in Hartmann's life, inclination was not consulted. The door behind them opened sharply,

and the clasped hands parted as if at a signal. Hartmann slipped back into his chair at the desk, while the girl busied herself with a new and commendable activity in her task of setting the immaculate room to rights.

Both seemed to realise without turning around that one more of their too brief interviews had been unceremoniously cut short.

The man whose advent caused the curtailment of the promise's sealing was as foreign looking as the room itself. Dapper, dressed in a sort of elaborate carelessness, his figure alone carried with it an air of assurance that Hartmann always found almost as irritating as the man's gracefully exaggerated manner and speech. His blonde hair was brushed back from a high, narrow forehead. A turned-up moustache and a close-trimmed and pointed Van Dyke beard added to the foreign aspect.

The newcomer took in the scene with a glance that apparently grasped none of its details. He nodded curtly to Hartmann, then crossed to where the girl was dusting.

CHAPTER II

THE HEIR

"HELLO, Kitty," he said. "Good-morning."

"Good-morning, Frederik," responded the girl, and started toward the stairs.

But the man intercepted her. Catching her playfully by the arm he tried to draw her toward him.

"You're pretty as a June rose to-day," he laughed.

Hartmann, instinctively, had half-risen from his chair. The girl, noting his movement and the frown gathering on his face, checked her impulse to retort, quietly disengaged herself from the newcomer's familiar grasp, and ran up the short stair flight that led into the gallery.

In no way offended, the man glanced after her with another short laugh, then turned to Hartmann.

"Where's my uncle?" he asked.

Hartmann looked up with elaborate slowness from the notes he was making of the newly opened mail. His eyes at last rested on the dapper figure

before him, with the impersonal, faintly irritated gaze one might bestow on a yelping puppy.

"Mr. Grimm is outside," he answered. "He's watching my father spray the plum trees. The black knot's getting ahead of us this year."

"I wonder," grumbled Frederik, lounging across to the window, "if it's possible once a year to ask a simple question of any inmate of this cursedly dreary old place without getting a botanical answer."

"That's what we are here for—those of us that work," said Hartmann, returning to his note making.

"Work, work, work!" mocked Frederik. "When I inherit my beloved uncle's fortune, I shall buy up all the dictionaries and have that wretched word crossed out of them."

Hartmann made no reply. He did not seem to have heard. But Frederik, absently ripping to atoms a Richmond rose from the window table vase, continued his muttered tirade. An inattentive audience was better than none.

"Work!" he growled. "When people here aren't talking about it, they're doing it. Grubby, earthy work. And it was to prepare for this sort of thing that I loafed through Leyden and Heidel-

berg! Yes, and loafed through, creditably, too; even if Oom Peter did bully me into making a specialty of botany. Botany! Dry as dust. After the University and after my *wanderjahr,* I thought it would be another easy task to come here, and 'learn the business.' Easy! As easy as the treadmill. And as congenial."

"I wonder you don't tell Mr. Grimm all that. I'm sure it would interest him."

"My dear, worthy uncle, who builds such wonderful hopes on me? Not I. It would break his noble heart. I hope you quite understand, Hartmann, that I keep quiet only through fear of wounding him and not with any fear that he might bequeath the business elsewhere."

"Quite," returned Hartmann drily. "That's why I keep my mouth shut when he holds you up to me as a paragon of zeal and industry and asks me why I don't pattern myself after you. But, for all that, you're taking chances when you talk to me about him as you do."

"I'm not," contradicted Frederik. "I may not know botany. But I know men. You love me about as much as you love smallpox. But you belong to the breed that doesn't tell tales. Besides, I've got to speak the truth to some one,

once in a while, if I don't want to explode. You're a splendid safety valve, Hartmann."

The secretary bent over his notes. His forehead veins swelled, and his face darkened. But he gave no overt sign of offence. Frederik, watching keenly, seemed disappointed.

"In New York," he pursued with a sigh, "they're just about thinking of waking up. And look at the time *I'm* routed out of bed! Say, Hartmann, I wish you would give Oom Peter a hint to oil his shoes. Every morning he wakes me up at five o'clock, creaking down the stairs. It's a sort of pedal alarm clock. Creak! Creak! Creak!—*Ach, Gott!* Even yet I can hardly keep one eye open. If ever it pleases Providence to give me my heritage, the first thing I'll do will be to sleep till noon. And then to go to sleep again."

He stared moodily out of the window into the glowing, flower-starred June world.

"How I loathe this pokey, dead old village!" he complained. "And what wouldn't I give to be back with the old Leyden crowd for one little night!"

He lurched over to the piano, sat carelessly, sidewise, on its stool, and, thrumming at the key-

board, fell to humming in a slurring, reminiscent fashion, the old Leyden University chorus:

"Ach, daar koonet ye amuseeren! Io vivat—Io vivat
Nostorum sanitas, hoc estamoris porculum,
Dolores est anti gotum—Io vivat—Io vivat
Nostorum sanitas—!

"Say, Hartmann," he broke off from his jumble of Dutch and Hollandised Latin, "the old man is aging. He's aging fast."

"Who?" asked Hartmann absently, glancing up from his work. "Oh, your uncle? Yes, he is mellowing. He is changing foliage with the years."

"Changing foliage? Not he. He changes nothing. What was good enough forty years ago seems to him quite good enough to-day. He's as old-fashioned as his hats. And they're the oldest things since Noah's time. He's just as old-fashioned in his financial ways. In my opinion, for instance, this would be a capital time to sell out the business. But he——"

"Sell out?" echoed Hartmann in genuine horror. "Sell out a business that's been in his family for—why, man, he'd as soon sell his soul. This business is his religion."

"Yes, and that's why it is so flourishing in spite of his back-date customs. It's at the very

acme of its prosperity now. Why, the plant must be worth an easy half million. Yes, and more. Lord, but it *would* sell now! One, two, three,—*Augenblick!* By the way, speaking of selling,—what was the last offer the dear old gentleman turned down from Hicks of Rochester?"

But Hartmann did not hear the question. He was staring at Frederik in open-mouthed astonishment.

"Sell out?" he repeated dully. "This is a new one—even from you. There isn't a day your uncle doesn't tell me how triumphantly you are going to carry on the business after he is gone. He——"

"Oh, I am!" sneered Frederik. "I am. Of course I am. How can you doubt it. Wait and see. It's a big name—'Peter Grimm.' And the old gentleman knows his business. He assuredly knows his business."

"I don't mind being the repository of your confidences about hating work," burst out Hartmann, "any more than I mind listening to the mewing of a sick cat. But when you strike this new vein, you'll have to choose another audience. I'm afraid I'd be likely to take sudden charge of the meeting and break the talented orator's neck."

He gathered up some of his papers and stamped out. Frederik looked after him uncertainly, took a step toward the door through which the secretary had just vanished, then thought better of the idea, laughed shortly, and drew out a cigarette. But a creaking of heavy shoes on the walk outside led him to slip the cigarette back into its case, and to bend interestedly over the pile of office mail Hartmann had opened.

If Kathrien had typified all that was dainty and alluring in the room's Dutch art, the man who now stamped in from the front vestibule, assuredly was typical of all old Holland's solidity. Stocky, of medium height, he was clad more as though he had copied the fashions depicted in a daguerrotype than those of the twentieth century. His black broadcloth was of no recent cut. His low, upright collar and broad cravat were of stock-like aspect, while a high hat such as he wore has certainly appeared in no show window since 1870.

Withal, there was nothing ludicrous or even incongruous about the costume. It belonged with the wearer. And while on another man it would have been absurd, on him it seemed the only logical apparel.

Peter Grimm halted in the vestibule, laboriously

removed his rubbers, and dropped his heavy ash stick into its place on the rack. Then he carefully lifted the antique hat from his head, deposited it on a peg, and came forward into the room. The face, revealed as he left the vestibule's gloom for the bright sunlight, was at first glance hard, deeply lined, and stubborn; the effect accented by a set mouth, the little truculently alert eyes under bushy brows, and the slightly uptilted nose.

A second look, however, would have revealed, to any one who could read faces, a lovable and almost tender light behind the eye's sharp twinkle and a kindly, humorous twist to the stubborn mouth. Hot temper, the physiognomist would have read, and obstinacy. But there the catalogue of faults would have ended abruptly. The rest was warm heart, trustfulness, eager sympathy,—an almost child-like friendliness toward the world at large that forever battled for mastery with native Dutch shrewdness.

There was far more kindness than shrewdness in the square old face just now, as Grimm noted his nephew's presence and his deep absorption in the contents of the mail. Frederik looked up as Grimm came forward.

"Good-morning, Oom Peter," said he.

"Good-morning, Fritzy," returned Grimm. "Hard at work, I see."

"Not so hard but that you were ahead of me. I felt unpardonably lazy when I heard you come downstairs at five."

"I'm sorry I woke you. Youngsters need their sleep. We old fellows have done about all the dozing we need to do; and we are coming so close to our Long Sleep that God gives us extra wakefulness for the little time left; so we may see as much as possible of this glorious old world of His."

"I ran over from the office——"

"Oh, I know why you ran over, Fritzy. A word with Kathrien—yes?"

"No, sir, I try to forget everything but work during business hours. I came to look for you. I've a suggestion——"

"Yes?"

Grimm's face lighted with the rare smile that played over its harsh outlines like sunshine. Each proof of his nephew's interest in the work was as tonic to him.

"I came over," went on Frederik, by hard mental calisthenics creating an impromptu sugges-

tion, "to propose that we insert a full-page cut of your new tulip in our midsummer floral almanac."

"H'—m!" muttered Grimm doubtfully. "I don't see why we——"

"Oh, sir, the public's expecting it."

"What makes you think so?"

"Why," now quite at home with his newly evolved notion, "you've no idea the stir the tulip has made. We get letters from everywhere——"

"It didn't seem to me anything so extraordinary," said Grimm modestly, albeit hugely gratified. "I'll think over the plan. What have you been doing all day?"

Frederik glanced at the clock. It registered three minutes before nine.

"Oh, I've had a busy morning," he answered. "In the packing house. Lots of orders to attend to. It's never safe to trust the more important ones to subordinates."

"That's right," approved Grimm. "Fritzy, it does me good, all through, to see you taking hold of the business the way you're doing."

Further praise was cut short by old Marta, the housekeeper, who bustled in to attend to her reg-

ular nine o'clock duty of winding the chain-weighted Dutch clock.

As she drew up the weights with a grate and a whirr that made audible conversation quite out of the question, she formed a study, in clothes and visage, that might have stepped direct from a Franz Hals canvas.

There was nothing American or modern about the old woman. Nothing about her save her face had changed since the day, sixty years back, when an earlier Grimm, returning from a visit from the Fatherland, had brought her to Grimm Manor as maid for his young American wife. Her task accomplished, Marta turned dutifully to courtesy to her master.

"*Huge moroche, Mynheer Grimm,*" she saluted him. "*Komt ujuist eut di teum?*"

"*Ja,*" replied Peter, dropping into the tongue of his fathers, yet with an odd twinkle in his little eyes. "*En ik bin hongerig.*—Taking her morning exercise," he added, noting the performance with the clock weights.

"You are always making fun of me!" sniffed Marta, trying not to grin as she swept indignantly out of the room.

In her departure she nearly collided with Hart-

mann, who was entering from the offices. Seating himself at the desk, dictation pad in hand, Hartmann asked:

"Are you ready for me, sir?"

"Yes," answered Grimm.—"No, I'm not. But I will be in a minute. There's something I'd forgotten. Wait——"

Cupping his hands about his mouth, Grimm wheeled to face the gallery and shouted a curiously high-pitched dissyllable:

"*Ou—hoo!*"

And, as though a sweeter, more silvery echo of the rough old voice, came from one of the gallery rooms an answering hail. Kathrien herself followed close upon her reply to the familiar signal call.

"Oh, Oom Peter!" she exclaimed, running lightly down the stairs and throwing her arms about his neck. "Good-morning. How careless I was not to come sooner and make your coffee. I didn't know you were in yet. You must be half starved."

She started for the dining-room. But Grimm's arm was about her waist, detaining her.

"This is the very busiest little woman you ever saw, Frederik," he announced. "She is forever

thinking of things to do for me. And I'm never remembering to do anything for her."

"Shame!" cried Kathrien, "you do everything in this big world for me, Oom Peter, and you know it. I've got everything any girl's heart could ask."

"Oh, no, you haven't though," sagely contradicted Grimm. "Before you say that, wait till I give you some fine young chap for a husband. Hey, Frederik?"

She drew away from his embrace with gentle impatience.

"Don't, Oom Peter," she begged. "You're always talking about weddings lately. I don't know what's come over you."

"It's nesting time," Grimm defended himself. "Weddings are in the air. And then, I keep thinking of all the linen packed in my grandmother's chest upstairs. We must use it again some day. There, there, little girl! You shan't be teased any more. Only, I'll leave it to you, Fritzy, if she doesn't deserve a grand husband,—this little girl of mine. If for no other reason, to pay for all she's done for me."

"Done for you?" laughed Kathrien. "Truly, I was forgetting that. I do you the great favour of letting you do everything for me."

"Nonsense! Who lays out my linen and brushes my clothes and fixes wonderful little dishes for me, and puts my slippers and dressing gown in front of the fire on cold nights, and puts flowers on my desk every day? And, best of all, *Kindchen,* who floods this old house of mine with the glory of Youth?"

"Youth?" she mocked with the true scorn of the young for their supreme gift. "Youth can't do very much. What does it amount to?"

"Nothing much," gravely answered her uncle. "Youth, as you say, is not anything worth mentioning. It is only the most priceless and most perishable treasure in God's storehouse. It is only the thing that means Beauty and Strength and Hope. It is the thing we all despise as long as we have it and would give our souls to get back as soon as we have lost it. No, as you say, Youth doesn't amount to much. It is only the nearest approach to Immortality that mortals have ever known. Why, where should I be now,—a grouchy old bachelor like me—without Youth in my house? Why, Frederik, this girl has made me feel kindlier toward all other women."

"Oh, I have, have I?" demanded Kathrien, "that's more than I bargained for."

"Don't flatter yourself," he joked. "It's only the way one feels about a pet. One likes all the rest of the breed."

"That's true," broke in Hartmann, throwing himself into the conversation on impulse. "It's so. A man studies one girl and then presently he begins to notice the same little traits in them all. It makes one feel differently toward the rest of them."

He glanced shamefacedly back at his dictation pad as the others turned and stared at him in astonishment. But not before he had noted the shy smile that crept over Kathrien's face or the unpleasant glint in Frederik's pale eyes.

Hartmann so seldom took part in general conversation and was so reticent concerning every phase of sentiment, that Grimm was for the moment almost as astounded as though one of his own bulbs had burst into speech.

"An expert opinion," commented Frederik sneeringly. "And from a confirmed bachelor like James!"

"A confirmed bachelor?" Grimm innocently caught up the slur. "What a life! I know. I have been one ever since I can remember. When a bachelor wants to order a three-rib stand-

ing roast, who is to eat it? Why, I never had the right sort of a roast on my table until Katje came into the family. And now that you're here too, Fritzy, the roasts get bigger. But not big enough, even yet. Oh, we must find the husband for——"

"Oom Peter!" protested Kathrien. "You promised you wouldn't tease——"

"Tease?" repeated Grimm, as though he heard the word for the first time. "Why, how could you have imagined such a thing, child? I was only telling Frederik about the sort of roasts I like on my table. And speaking of tables, Fritzy, I like a nice long table with plenty of young people at it. And myself at the head, carving and carving, and seeing the plates passed round and round and round;—getting them back and back and back—There, there, Katje! They shan't tease you. We'll keep the table just as it is. For you and Fritz and me. A nice little circle. All in the family."

The telephone bell set up a purring. Hartmann picked up the receiver.

"Hello," he called. "Yes, this is Mr. Grimm's house.— Yes.— Wait one moment, please."

He put his palm over the transmitter and turned to Grimm.

"It's Hicks again, sir," he reported. "He wants to talk more with you about buying the business."

"Buying the business, hey?" snorted Grimm in sudden rage. "No! No! I've told him ten million times it's not on the market and never will be. Tell him so again."

"Mr. Grimm says," called Hartmann into the transmitter, "that the business is not for sale. He says—what?—Wait a minute. Mr. Grimm, he insists on speaking to you personally."

"He does, hey?" growled Peter, advancing upon the telephone as though upon an enemy that must be crushed at a blow.

"Hello!" he roared wrathfully into the instrument. "Hello?—What?—Why, my old friend, how are you?—And how are your plum trees doing? Mine, too. Well, we can only pray and use Bordeaux Mixture.—What?"

He paused to listen. Then he went on as if to humour a cross child.

"No, no,—it's nonsense. Why, this business has been in the Grimm family for over a hundred years. Why should I sell? I'm going to arrange

for it to stay in the family a hundred years longer. —Hey? What's that?—No, no. Of course not. Of course I don't propose to live a hundred years longer. But I propose that my plans shall. How can I make certain? Never mind how. I'm going to arrange all that. Yes, I know I'm a bachelor. You don't need to spend good money on long distance phoning, to remind me of that. Oh —good-bye!"

Grimm turned away from the table with a growl, to confront Kathrien.

"Why, girl!" he exclaimed, in quick concern. "You look as if you are going to cry. What is it? Tell Oom Peter!"

CHAPTER III

PETER GRIMM HAS A PLAN

"THAT man!" panted Kathrien. "He actually wants to buy our home—our gardens! Oh!" slipping for a moment back into the Dutch that was ever nearer to her heart than English, *"Stel je zoon brutali tat!"*

"Don't you worry!" consoled Peter. "He won't get a stick or a stone of ours. Wouldn't you think that girl had been born a Grimm, Fritzy? She's got the true spirit. No, no, dear. Of course we won't sell. Never. Never. *Never.* Hey, Fritz?"

"Certainly not!" declared Frederik. "The idea is preposterous."

"Fritzy!" exclaimed Grimm. "Speaking of ideas, I've got one, too. We'll print the Grimm history in our new Midsummer Almanac. That's better than a full-page cut of any tulip that ever sprouted. Katie, go get the Staaten Bible and read it aloud to us. We can tell, then, how it will strike the public."

The girl went to the side table where lay the

great Bible, drew a chair up to it, seated herself, turned over the leaves until she found what she sought, then began to read in a manner that argued many previous renditions of the quaint old phraseology.

"In the spring of 1709 there settled on Quassic Creek, New York Colony, Johann Grimm, aged twenty-two—husbandman and vinedresser. Also, Johanna, his wife. To him Queen Anne furnished one square, one rule, one compass, two whipping saws, and several small pieces——"

"You left out 'two augers,'" prompted Grimm.

"Yes, 'and two augers.' To him was born a son and——"

"See?" cried Grimm. "That was the foundation of our family and our business here. And here we are, still. After seven generations. We'll print it. Hey, Fritzy?"

"Certainly, sir," approved Frederik, stifling a yawn with an access of filial enthusiasm. "By all means, we'll print it."

"And, Fritzy," continued Grimm, with heavy significance, "we're relying on you for the next line in the book."

Frederik glanced around him. Hartmann,

during the reading, had gone from the room to get some papers he had left at the office. But Kathrien still lingered, restoring the Bible to its wonted place.

"Oh, by the way, Oom Peter," said Frederik, lowering his voice so as not to reach the girl's ears, "I want to speak to you about a private matter when you can spare me a moment. When I come back from the packing house will be time enough. I just want to give a glance to those last shipments."

"All right, lad," agreed Grimm. "Any time."

He looked fondly after the dapper figure.

"Isn't he a splendid, handsome, hustling young chap, Katje?" he demanded. "If only his mother had lived to see him now, wouldn't she have been proud of him? And what a complete little family we three make!"

"We three?" hesitated the girl.

"Surely. That's all there are of us—at present,—isn't it? I don't think I have made a miscount."

"You don't count in James!"

"James?" he queried sharply. "Why should I?"

"Why shouldn't you?" she retorted eagerly.

"Oom Peter, if you don't mind my saying so, I think you're just a little unfair to James. He used to have dinner with us nearly every day. Can't you make him a little more at home—more like one of the family?"

"Why, you good, unselfish little girl!" applauded Grimm. "You think of everybody. James is——"

Hartmann came in with several newly typed letters to be signed, and Grimm turned to meet him with something akin to cordiality.

"James," said he, "will you have dinner with us to-day?"

"Why, yes," answered Hartmann, in pleased surprise. "Certainly. Thank you very much. Will you glance over these and sign them?" he added, wondering at the grateful smile Kathrien flashed at Peter as she passed into the dining-room and left the two men alone together.

Grimm, too, wondered a little at the warmth of the girl's smile.

"She has bloomed out lately like a rose," he mused as he looked over the letters the secretary proffered him.

"Yes, sir!" involuntarily agreed Hartmann.

"So you've noticed it, too?"

"Yes, sir," replied Hartmann stiffly as he recovered his self-control.

"*Ach!*" murmured Grimm, as he signed letter after letter and passed them over to Hartmann for sealing. "What a grip she has taken on my heart! A good girl, James. A good little girl. And I've sheltered her, ever since she came to me, as I shelter my violets from the cold. That's as it should be, hey?"

"Y-e-s,—in a way."

"What's that?" bristled Grimm, looking up at the unexpected answer to the question that had seemed to him to require none. "What do you mean? Oh, speak out, man!" as the secretary hesitated. "Never be afraid to express an honest opinion."

"I mean just this. No one can shape any one else's life. All people should be made to understand that they are—free."

"Free? Nonsense! Katje's free. Free as air. Do you mean to tell me a girl should be more free than she is? We must think for young people who can't think for themselves. And no girl can."

"But I believe——"

"Bah! Who cares what *you* believe. James,

I'm sometimes afraid you're just a little bit set in your ways;—almost obstinate."

"But in this," stoutly maintained Hartmann, "I know I'm right. We can't think for other people any more than we can eat or sleep for them. Every happy creature is bound, by nature, to lead its own life. And, first of all, it must be *free!*"

"James," asked Grimm in amused contempt, "where on earth do you get these wild ideas?"

"By reading what modern thinkers write, sir."

"H'—m! I thought so. Change your mental diet. There's a set of Jost Vanden Vandell over on the shelves. Read it. Cultivate sentiment."

Hartmann shrugged his big shoulders and went on sealing and stamping letters. But Grimm would not let this topic drop so easily.

"Free!" he scoffed. "Maybe you've thought you noticed Katje was not happy?"

"No, sir. I can't honestly say I have."

"I should think not!" chimed in Peter. "These are the happiest hours of her whole life. Don't I know? Can't I tell? Don't I know her and love her better than any one else does? She's

happy. Beautifully happy. And why shouldn't she be? She's young. She's in love. She's soon to be married. What girl wouldn't be happy?"

There was a long pause. Peter was reading over the last letter of the budget. Hartmann was staring at him aghast.

"Soon to be married?" breathed the secretary when he could steady his voice. "Then—then it's all settled, sir?"

"No," replied Peter. "But it soon will be. *I'm* going to settle it. Any one can see how she feels toward Frederik."

"But," faltered Hartmann lamely, "isn't she very—very *young* to be married?"

"Not when she marries into the family. Not when *I'm* here to watch over her. You see—Sit down again, James. I like to talk about it to some one who is interested. And you *are* interested, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir," the secretary managed to say.

"Very good. Now, in following out my plans——"

"Oom Peter," called Kathrien from the dining-room, "I have your coffee all ready. Shall I bring it in?"

"By and by, dear. By and by. I am busy

now. I'll let you know. Shut the door, won't you?"

She obeyed. And to the hungrily watching secretary it seemed as if the door were closing, in his very face, upon the gates of Paradise.

"In following my plans," Grimm was repeating, "I've had to be pretty shrewd and secretive. For it wouldn't do to let either of them suspect too soon. And I flatter myself they didn't. Here's my notion. I made up in my mind to keep Katje in the family. I'm a rich man. And so I've had to guard against young fellows who would dangle around after a girl for her money. I've guarded that point rather well. The whole town, for instance, understands that Katje hasn't a penny. Doesn't it?"

"I believe so."

"I've made a number of wills. But I've destroyed them all, one after another. And any time any of her boy friends called, I've—well, I've had business that kept me here in the room. When she goes to a dance, how does she go? With *me*. When she goes to the theatre, how does she go? With *me*. When she has had candy or any other present, who gave it to her? *I* did. And so it has been from the first. Every pleasure

—she's had 'em all. And she had 'em all from *me*. What's the result? She's perfectly happy and——"

"But," argued Hartmann, "did you want her to be happy simply because *you* were happy? Didn't you want her to be happy because *she*——?"

"So long as she is happy," retorted Grimm, "why should I care what does it?"

"If she's happy," repeated the secretary.

"If she's happy?" mocked Grimm, his Dutch temper beginning to smoulder behind his gentle, obstinate little eyes. "If? What do you mean? That's the second time you've—Why do you harp on that *if?*"

His voice rose threateningly. The silver grey mane on his head bristled like a boar's. Hartmann rose and started quietly for the door.

"Where are you going?" shouted Grimm.

"Excuse me, sir," said the secretary, continuing his doorward progress.

"Come back here!" ordered Grimm fiercely. "Come back here, I say! Sit down! So! Now, tell me what you mean! What do you know—or *think* you know?"

"Mr. Grimm," answered Hartmann, cornered

and desperate, "you are the greatest living authority on tulips. You can perform miracles with them. But you can't mate people as you graft tulips. You can't do it. More than once I have caught Miss Katie crying. And I've——"

"Pooh!" snorted Grimm. "Caught her crying, have you? Of course. So have I. What does that amount to? Was there ever a girl that didn't cry? All women cry until they have something to cry about. Then they're too busy *living* to waste time in such luxuries as tears. Why, time and time again, I've asked her why she was crying. And always she'd answer: 'For no reason at all. For nothing.' And that is the answer. They love to cry. But that's what they all cry over;—'Nothing!'"

Hartmann did not answer. Grimm's gust of anger had been blown away by the wind of his own words. He went on in a half-amused reminiscent tone:

"James, did I ever tell you how I happened to get Katje? She was prescribed for me by Dr. McPherson."

"Prescribed?"

"Yes, just that. As an antidote for getting to be a fussy old bachelor with queer notions in my

head. And the cure worked to perfection. When my old friend Staats died——"

"Oh, yes, I've often heard——"

But Peter Grimm was no more to be balked in the repetition of his favourite narrative merely because his hearer chanced to be familiar with its every detail, than he would have been balked in hearing the Grimm genealogy re-read for the thousandth time.

"When my old friend Staats died," he said, "McPherson brought Staats's motherless baby over here; and he said: 'Peter, this is what you need in the house.' Those were his very words: 'Peter, this is what you need in the house.' And, sure enough, the very first time I carried her up those stairs over there, all my fine, cranky, crotchety bachelor notions flew out of my head. I knew then, in a flash, that all my knowledge and all my queer ideas of life were just humbug! I had missed the Child in the House. Yes,"—his voice dropped with a strain of soft regret,—"I had missed *many* children in the house. James, I was born in that little room up there. The room I sleep in. And one day, please God, Katje's children shall play in the room where I was born."

"Yes," acquiesced Hartmann as Grimm ceased,

—and the secretary's voice and words grated like a file on the old man's tender mood,—" it's a very pretty picture—if it turns out at all the way you are trying to paint it."

" How can it turn out wrong? " demanded Peter, in fresh irritation. " What's the matter with the way I'm ' painting the picture ' ? "

" From your standpoint, as I say, it's very pretty. But it's more than a mere question of sentiment. Her children can play anywhere."

" What? You're talking rubbish! I pick out a husband *here*—and her children can play in China if they want to? Are you crazy? Pshaw," turning away in disgust, " I just waste words in opening my heart's dear secrets to a dolt like you."

" Perhaps," assented Hartmann, quite unruffled, as he set to work enveloping some seed catalogues that lay on the table. Grimm evidently was about to pursue the flying foe with fresh invective. But Marta came in from the kitchen, and, with her, Willem. At sight of the boy, Grimm's frown softened into a smile of welcome.

" Come seg huge moroche tegen, Mynheer Grimm," said Marta, while Willem, walking over

to Peter, held out a thin little hand in greeting, with the salutation:

"*Huge moroche, Mynheer Grimm.*"

"*Huge moroche, Willem,*" replied Grimm kindly, pressing the boy's hand.

"I'm all ready to take the flowers over to the rectory," announced Willem, drifting into English.

"If you're tired after going to the station, Otto can take them," said Grimm.

"Oh, I'm not a bit tired."

"And you're getting real well again?"

"*Ja, Mynheer.* The doctor says I'm all right now."

"That's good. Tell Otto to give you a *big* armful of flowers for the rectory. A *big* armful, remember."

Marta's grandmotherly gaze fancied it detected a twist in the boy's neatly tied cravat. So she swooped down upon him and bore him away to the window seat, where her blurring eyes would have light enough to readjust the tie to her satisfaction. Grimm, with a quick glance to make sure they were not in earshot, tapped Hartmann on the shoulder and whispered:

"There's a nice result of the 'freedom' you

said young girls ought to have. Marta's Anne Marie had nothing but freedom. She was the worst spoiled child in town. Marta let her come and go as she pleased. Come and go—Heaven knows where. And Heaven knows where the poor shamed girl is now. Every time I look at Willem," raising his voice to normal pitch as Marta and her grandson passed into the kitchen, "I realise how right I've been in the way I've brought up Katje. H'—m! Want me to give Katje a chance for more freedom, do you? Why——"

"Mr. Grimm," interrupted Hartmann, suddenly getting to his feet and facing his employer, "I'd like to be transferred to your Florida headquarters. At once, if it is convenient to you. I want to work out in the open for a while."

"What?" exclaimed Grimm dumfounded. "Florida? At this time of the year? And you were so glad to get back here to—Pshaw! You've just got a cranky fit on you, lad. Get rid of it. Put on your overalls and go out and potter around among those beloved vegetables of yours. Change your ideas, I say. Change the whole lot of them. They're all wrong. You don't know *what* you want."

Hartmann's lips were parted for a retort. But he closed them, turned on his heel, and left the room. Grimm shook his head as over a problem he could not solve and did not greatly care to. Then he fell to sorting a box full of bulbs.

But in a minute or two he was interrupted by Frederik.

"I saw Hartmann crossing the yard," said the younger man, "so I stepped over for a little chat with you, if you've time to listen to me."

"I've always got time to listen to you, Fritzy," replied Grimm, still busy with his bulbs. "It'll be a relief after that pig-headed James. Lord, how I do hate an obstinate man! You said a while ago you wanted to see me on a private matter. What was it? If it's that full-page coloured cut of the new tulip, I may as well tell you——"

"It isn't. It's about your pig-headed friend, James."

"James? What about him?"

"Just this, Oom Peter: I think he is interested in Kathrien."

"Who? James? Bah! You're dreaming. That's just like a lover. Thinks every one is try-

ing to steal his sweetheart. Why, James is too much wrapped up in his work to care about anything else. His work and his crazy theories that he gets out of books. Interested in Kathrien? Just to show you how foolish you are to think that, he asked me not five minutes ago to transfer him to the Florida headquarters. And, even if he weren't so absorbed in the business, he'd never even presume to think of Kathrien. It's preposterous!"

"Is it?" said Frederik, quite unconvinced. "Yet I've reason to believe he has been making love to her."

There was a quiet certainty in his nephew's voice that caught Grimm's reluctant credence.

"We'll find out mighty soon," he declared. "Katje!"

"No, no!" expostulated Frederik. "It would be better not to bring her into it or give her the idea that——"

"Katje!"

"Yes, Oom Peter," answered the girl, hurrying in from the dining-room in response to the bellowed summons. "What's the matter?"

"Katje," began the old man in visible embarrassment, "has—has James——?"

"What?" queried Kathrien, as Grimm paused and broke into a shamefaced laugh.

"Has—has James ever shown any special interest in you? Ever made love to you, or——?"

"Oh, Oom Peter!" expostulated Kathrien, reddening to the roots of her hair. "Whatever gave you such an idea as that?"

"Nothing at all," he answered her. "It was just a bit of silly nonsense. A joke. I can't help teasing you. Because you blush so prettily. But —but *has* he?"

"Why, of course not. I've always known James. Ever since I can remember. He's never shown any interest in me that he ought not to,— if that's what you mean. He's always been *very* respectful; in a perfectly—a perfectly friendly way."

She was scarlet and stammering. But Grimm apparently did not notice her confusion.

"Respectful," he repeated musingly. "In a perfectly friendly way. Surely we couldn't ask for anything more than that. Thank you, little girl. That's all I wanted to know. Run along."

Casting a puzzled look at Grimm and then at Frederik—who, since she first entered the room had been seated near the window, deeply absorbed

in a book,—Kathrien returned to her work in the other part of the house.

Grimm's kind eyes had never for an instant left her troubled face, nor had they failed to note her evident relief at escaping from the room. As the door closed behind her, the kindly look faded from the old eyes, leaving them hard and cold. The firm jaw set more tightly. Yet, as he turned toward Frederik, there was no trace in his tone of anything but pleasant banter.

"There, Fritzy!" said he. "You see James was only 'respectful to her in a perfectly friendly way.' I hope you are quite satisfied?"

"I am," answered Frederik. "Quite. In fact I'm every bit as satisfied as you are, uncle."

Grimm sat very still for a moment or so, staring blindly into space, his head on his breast. Then, with a sigh, he roused himself. Reaching for the telephone he called up his office.

"Send Mr. Hartmann over here," he commanded.

He set down the instrument and resumed his blank stare into nothingness. Frederik was once more wholly engrossed in the book he was not reading. Hartmann broke in upon the strained silence.

"You sent for me, sir?" he asked, his breezy bigness waking the still room to life.

"Yes," replied Peter Grimm. "James, it has occurred to me—to ask—it has occurred to me that—James, please tell me your reason for asking a few minutes ago to be transferred to Florida?"

James made no immediate reply. He seemed ransacking his mind for the right words. Grimm eyed him closely, asking with sudden directness:

"Was it on account of my little girl?"

"Yes, sir," replied Hartmann.

The secretary's confusion had fled. Calm, self-contained, flinching not at all from the shrewd, searching eyes that were fixed on his own, he stood awaiting the breaking of the storm.

CHAPTER IV

A WARNING AND A THEORY

BUT, to Hartmann's surprise, the storm did not break. Instead, Peter Grimm sat gazing at him with impassive face,—gazing long and without a word. And when at last Grimm spoke, the old man's voice was as emotionless as his face.

"You love her?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," answered Hartmann, as calmly as though stating some fact in botany.

"H'—m!" rumbled Grimm, half to himself. "*Ja vis! Ja vis!*"

Hartmann still waited for the storm. And still it did not come.

"You love her?" repeated Grimm. "Does she know?"

"No. She doesn't know. She need never know. I had not meant to say a word to any one."

Grimm rose and came toward him. The hard face was gentle again. The inquisitorial voice was once more kindly.

"James," said the old man, "go to the office

and get your money. Then start for Florida headquarters. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, sir," replied James, grasping the outstretched hand. "I'm very sorry."

"I'm sorry, too, James. Good-bye!"

As Hartmann left the room, Grimm turned to Frederik, and his eyes were full of pain.

"*That* is settled, thank Heaven!" he announced; but there was no jubilance in his voice. "I wish—Hello, there's old McPherson!"

Glad to divert his mind he hurried to the front door to welcome the visitor and drew him into the room with friendly roughness.

Dr. McPherson would have borne the stamp, "Family physician of the Old School," even had he been found in the ranks of the Matabele army. Big, shaggy, bearded, he was of the ancient and puissant type that, under the tidal wave of "specialism" is fast being swept towards the shores where live the last survivors of the Great Auk, the Dinosaur, and the Spread Eagle Orator tribes.

"Good-morning, Peter," hailed the doctor, a Scotch burr faintly rasping his bluff voice. "Morning, Fred. I passed young Hartmann at the gate. He looks as if he was taking a pleasure trip to his own funeral. What ails him?"

No one answered.

"He's about the finest lad that ever I brought into the world. What's happened to make him so——? Good-morning, Kathrien," he broke off, as the girl, followed by Marta, came in with Grimm's long delayed breakfast.

"Good-morning, Doctor," she answered. "Oom Peter, you forgot to send for this. So I——"

"What's that?" roared McPherson, sniffing the air like a bull that scents an enemy. "Coffee? Why, damn it, Peter, I forbade you to touch coffee. It's rank poison to you. And you know it is. I told you——"

"Wouldn't you like a cup, Doctor?" asked Kathrien innocently.

"I——"

"Of course he'll take a cup," interrupted Grimm. "He'll damn it. But he'll drink it."

"And look here!" proceeded McPherson, pointing an accusing finger at the breakfast tray. "Waffles! Actually *waffles!* And after I told you——"

"Yes, Katje," explained Grimm, "he'll damn the waffles, too. But, if you watch closely, you'll notice he'll eat some. Sit down, Andrew."

"I tell you," fumed the doctor, "I didn't come here to encourage you, by my example, in wrecking your system. I came for a serious talk with you, Peter."

Kathrien, at the hint, discreetly effaced herself. Frederik followed her example.

"Well? well?" queried Peter in mock despair, seating himself opposite his old crony and tyrant. "What new horrors of diet have you thought up for my misery? Out with it. Let me know the worst."

"It isn't your body this time, Peter," was the troubled answer. "It's something that means more. The matter's been keeping me awake all night. Tell me:—how is every one provided for in this house?"

"Provided for?" echoed Peter in bewilderment. "How do you mean? Everybody gets enough to eat and we are——"

"Why, you don't understand me. You're a wonderful man for making plans, Peter. But what have you done?"

"Done?"

"If you—if you were to die—say to-morrow, or—or any other time," went on the doctor with an effort at carelessness that sat on his rough hon-

esty as ill as his Sunday broadcloth adorned his rugged shoulders, "if you—die—unexpectedly,—how would it be with the rest of them here?"

Grimm set down his coffee cup with slow precision. And slowly he raised his eyes to McPherson's worried gaze.

"What do you mean?" he asked with something very like awe in his tone. "If I were to die to-morrow——"

"You won't!" declared McPherson emphatically. "You won't. So don't worry. You're good for a long time yet. A score of years, perhaps. You're all right, if you take decent care of yourself. Which you never do. But we've all got to come to it, sooner or later. And it's well to make provision. For instance, what would Kathrien's position be in this house, in case you were taken out of it? Kathrien is a little 'prescription' of mine, you'll remember. And—I suppose your heart is still set on her marrying Frederik, so that what is one's will be the other's. Personally I've always thought it was rather a pity that Frederik wasn't James and James wasn't Frederik."

"Eh?" cried Peter. "What's that?"

"It's none of my business," answered McPher-

son. "And it's all very well as it stands—if she wants Frederik. But if you want to do anything for *her* future welfare, take my advice, and do it *now.*"

"You mean," Peter said evenly, between stiffening lips, "you mean that I could—die?"

"Every one can," replied McPherson with elephantine lightness. "And at one time or another, every one does. It's a thing to be prepared for."

"One moment," urged Grimm, the keen little eyes piercing the other's badly woven cloak of indifference. "You think that I——!"

"I mean nothing more nor less, Peter, than that the machinery is wearing out. There's absolutely no cause for apprehension. Still, I thought I had better tell you."

"But," asked Grimm with a pathetic insistence, "if there's no cause for apprehension——?"

"Listen, Peter: when I cured you of that cold the other day—the cold you got by tramping around like an idiot among the wet flower-beds without rubbers—I made a discovery of—of something I can't cure."

Grimm studied his friend's unreadable face for an instant with an almost painful intensity. Then

a smile swept away the worry from his own visage.

"Oh, Andrew, you old croaking Scotch raven," he cried. "Your professional ways will be the death of some one yet. But the 'some one' won't be Peter Grimm. That sick bed manner is splendid for bullying old maids into taking their tonic. But it's wasted on a grown man. No, no, Andrew. You can't make *me* out an invalid. You doctors are a sorry lot. You pour medicines of which you know little into systems of which you know nothing. You condemn people to death as the old Inquisition would have blushed to. Why, every day we read in the papers about some frisky boy a hundred years old whom the doctors gave up for lost when he was twenty-five. And," the forced gaiety in his voice merging into aggressive resolve, "I'm going to live to see children in this old house of mine. Katje's babies creeping about this very floor; sliding down those bannisters over there, pulling the ears of Lad, my collie."

"Good Lord, Peter! That dog is fifteen years old *now!* Argue yourself into miraculous longevity if you want to. But don't argue old Lad into it. Do you expect *nothing* will ever change in your home?"

"Perhaps," agreed Peter, with unshaken defiance. "But not before I live to see a new line of rosy-faced, fluffy-haired little Grimms."

McPherson leaned back with a sigh of discouragement. Then, with professional insight, he noted for the first time the gallant fight the old man opposite him was making to keep up that obstinate gay courage whose outward expression had so irritated the doctor. And, all at once, McPherson ceased to become the gruff friend and assumed the rôle that Ananias's physician probably acquired from his famous patient and which, most assuredly, he has handed down to all his medical successors.

"I see no reason, Peter," said he with judicial ponderousness, "why you shouldn't reach a ripe old age. You're quite likely to outlive me and a host of younger men. Only, take better care of yourself. And,—no matter how many probable years of life a man has before him, it does him no harm to set his house in order. Think over that part of my advice and forget the rest of it."

"Forget the rest of it," echoed Grimm absently. "The rest——"

McPherson hesitated; then as though overcome

by a temptation too strong for him to battle against, he blurted out half-shamefacedly:

"Peter—don't laugh at me. I want to make a strange compact with you. As I've told you, you're quite likely to outlive me. But—will you agree that whichever of us happens to—to go first, —shall come back and—and let the other fellow know? Let the other fellow know; so as to settle the Great Question once and for all?"

Grimm stared at him for a moment. Then he set the room ringing with a laugh of whose mocking heartiness there could be no doubt.

"Oh, Andrew! Andrew!" he cried, when he could get his breath. "Still riding your one crazy hobby! And you so sane in other ways!"

"But you'll make the compact?" begged McPherson. "You're a man of your word,——"

"Make a compact to——? Oh, no, no, man. *No!* I'd be ashamed to have people know I was such a fool."

"But," urged the doctor, "no one else need know anything about it. It'll be just between ourselves."

"No, no, dear old Andrew," laughed Grimm indulgently. "Positively *no!* I refuse, point-blank. I'll do you any favour in reason. But I

draw the line at being dragged into any of your absurd spook tests."

"You sneer at 'spooks,' as you call them," retorted the doctor. "Most people do. Just as people scoffed when Columbus told them there was an America. But how many times do you think *you* have been a spook, yourself?"

"A spook? I can't remember that I ever——"

"Yes, a ghost."

"A ghost," repeated Grimm with the utmost solemnity and wrinkling his forehead as in an effort of memory. "I can't just now recall——"

"That's right! Make fun of me! But you can't tell that man is complete—that he doesn't live more than one life;—that the soul doesn't pass on and on. Smile if you like. Wiser men than yourself have believed it. Why, man alive, every human being is surcharged with a persistent personal energy. And that energy must continue forever."

"Oh, Doctor, Doctor!" exclaimed Kathrien, coming in with a fresh supply of hot waffles. "Have you started on spooks again?"

"Yes, Katje," sighed Peter dolorously. "There can be no possible redeeming doubt about that. He's started."

"And," laughed the girl, "I wasn't on hand to hear him. Have I missed very much of it?"

"No," answered her uncle. "We're still in the painful early stages of the squabble. I'll tell you what I'll do, Andrew: I'll compromise with you. Instead of making the bargain you proposed, I'll stand aside and let *you* go ahead of me into the next world. Then you can come back at your leisure and keep the spook compact. It'll be quite interesting. Every time a knock sounds or a chair creaks or a door bangs or Lad growls in his sleep, I'll strike an attitude and say: 'Ssh! There's Doc!'"

"Don't guy me, old friend," urged McPherson. "I'm entirely serious. I'll make the promise and I want *you* to make it, too. Understand, I'm no so-called Spiritist. I'm just a groping seeker after the Truth."

"That's what they all say," scoffed Grimm. "Seekers after the truth! And madly eager to believe everything they hear or read *except* the commonsense truth. And you, a level-headed Scotchman, old enough to be your own father, actually gulp down such tomfoolery! Next we'll have you chasing around the streets at night, looking with a dark lantern for the bogey man."

"Laugh at me if you like. I know I'm right. I know the dead *are* alive. They're here. Right here. They're all about us, watching us, suffering with us, rejoicing with us, trying no doubt to speak the warnings and encouragements that our world-deafened mortal ears cannot hear. I'm not alone in the theory. Some of the greatest scientists—the wisest men of the century—are of the same opinion."

"Dreamers," smiled Grimm indulgently. "Dreamers like yourself."

"Dreamers, eh?" The doctor caught him up vehemently. "*Dreamers?* You can't call Sir William Crookes, the inventor of the Crookes' Tubes, a dreamer! No, nor Sir Oliver Lodge, the great biologist; or Curie, who discovered radium; or Dr. Lombroso, the founder of the science of criminology. Are Maxwell, Dr. Vesine, Richet, and our own American, Dr. Hyslop, *dreamers?* Why, even Professor James, the mighty Harvard psychologist, took a peep at ghosts. And, instead of laughing at 'spooks,' the big scientific men are trying to lay hold of them. I tell you, Peter, Science is just beginning to peer through the half-open door that a few years ago was shut tight."

"Trying to lay hold of ghosts, are they?" said Grimm. "I'd like to lay hold of one. I'd lug it to the nearest police station. That's the place for 'em. Just as the asylum's the place for folks who believe in 'em. When you 'pass over,' Andrew, you'd better not come back. You won't enjoy prowling around a world where sane people don't believe you exist."

"Peter," reproved McPherson, "I'm sorry—very, *very* sorry—that you and others like you think it's smart to make a joke of something you can't understand. Hyslop was right when he said Man will spend millions of dollars to discover the North Pole, but not one cent to throw a ray of light upon his immortal destiny."

"And, after the millions of times they've been exposed, you blame me for not joining in your belief in spook mediums!"

"A lot of mediums are humbugs, I grant you. Just as there are fakers in every profession. If there were no such thing as real money, there would be no object in making counterfeits. And some of the mediums have proven clearly that they are capable of real demonstrations."

"They are, hey? What's the use of mediums at all if the dead can really come back? If my

friends who have died return to earth, why don't they walk straight up to me and say, 'Well, Peter Grimm. Here we are!' When they do that, I shall gladly be the first man to take off my hat to them and hold out my hand. But as long as they have to employ greasy mediums to make their presence known, and try to prove they are with me by knocking on tables and tipping chairs and scratching on slates, there is only one of two things to believe: Either mediums are fakes, or else folks all become imbecile practical jokers as soon as they die."

"Imbecile practical jokers!" repeated Kathrien, shocked.

"Yes," reiterated Peter Grimm. "That's what I said. And it's a mild way of putting it. Would any sane man play such tricks as the spiritualists attribute to our dead? It shatters every thought of the majesty of death. Would a sane *live* man walk into my house and announce his presence to me by rapping on a wall or tipping a table or scrawling idiotic messages on a slate or talking to me through some half-educated 'medium'? Would he——?"

"Yes, he would!" asserted the doctor. "He'd do all those things and more, if he couldn't make

you see him or hear him in any other way. As to mediums,—why doesn't a telegram travel through the air as well as on a wire? Your friends could come back to you in the old way if you could but put yourself in a receptive condition. But you can't. So you must depend on a non-professional medium,—a 'sensitive'——"

"See, Katje," interpolated Grimm, "he has names for them all. All neatly classified like so many germs in a bottle. Well, Andrew, how many ghosts did you see last night? He has only to shut his eyes, Katje, and along comes the parade. Spooks! Spooks! Spooks! Nice, grisly, shivering, spooky spooks! And now he wants me to put my house in order and settle up my affairs and join the parade."

"Settle your affairs?" asked Kathrien puzzled.

"Oh, it's just his nonsense," Grimm hastened to assure her. "Andrew,"—he hurried on to turn the subject from dangerous personalities,—"you've seen a whole lot of people pass over to the Other Side. In fact, your patients seem to have quite a habit of doing that. Tell me: did you ever see one out of all that number come back again? Just *one?*"

"No," answered McPherson reluctantly. "I never did, but——"

"No," cried Grimm in triumph, "and what's more, you never will. Yet you——"

"There was not perhaps the intimate bond between doctor and patients to bring them back to me. But in my own family, I've known of a 'return' such as you speak of. A distant cousin of mine died in London. And at almost that very instant, she was seen in New York."

"Rubbish!"

"Rubbish? Why? A century ago, if any one had tried to describe the telephone, people of your sort would have grunted 'Rubbish!' But if my voice can carry thousands of miles over the telephone, why cannot a soul, with God-given force behind it, dart over the entire universe? Is Thomas Edison greater than God?"

"Oh, Doctor," gasped the horrified Kathrien.

"And what's more," rushed on McPherson, unheeding, "they can't lay it all to telepathy. In the case of a spirit message giving the contents of a sealed letter known only to the person who has died—telepathy, eh? Not a bit of it. Here's a case you must have heard of, Peter. An officer on the Polar vessel *Jeannette* sent out by a New

York newspaper, appeared one night at his wife's bedside. She was in Brooklyn. She knew perfectly well that he was on the Polar Sea. He said to her: 'Count!' Then she distinctly heard a ship's bell and her husband's voice saying again, 'Count!' She had counted 'six' when his voice said: 'Six bells! And the *Jeannette* is lost!' The ship, it turned out later, was really lost at the very time the woman had the vision. There! Account for *that* by telepathy or trickery if you can!"

"A bad dream!" was Grimm's unshaken verdict. "I have them every now and then. 'Six bells and'—suet pudding brings me messages from the North Pole. And I can get messages from Kingdom Come when I've had half a hot mince pie with melted cheese on it for supper. That disposes of your *Jeannette* case."

"Scoff if you like. There have been more than seventeen thousand other cases which the London Society of Psychical Research has found worth investigating."

"Well, Andrew," asked Grimm, with a covert wink at Kathrien, "supposing, for the sake of argument, that I *did* want to 'come back,' how could I manage it?"

At the question the doctor's rising irritation at the other's friendly mockery was swept away by the zeal of prospective proselyting.

"In this way, Peter," he declared. "Let me make it clear as simply as I can. In hypnotism our thoughts take possession of the person we hypnotise. When our personalities enter their bodies, something goes out of them:—a sort of Shadow Self. This 'Self' can be sent out of the room—out of the house—even to a long distance. This 'Self' is the force that, I firmly believe, departs from us entirely on the first or second or third day after death. This is the force you could send back. The astral envelope. Do I make it plain?"

"Plain? Plain as a flower in the mud on a dark night. But how do you know *I've* got an—'envelope'?"

"Every one has. Why, De Roche has actually photographed one, by means of radio-photography."

Grimm lay back in his chair and shouted aloud with laughter.

"Mind you," went on McPherson, laboriously anxious to make clear his point, "they could not see it when they were photographing it."

"No, I should imagine not. Nor the picture after it was taken. But in other respects, I don't doubt it was a splendid likeness."

"Wait, before you try to be funny. Wait till I tell you about it. This 'envelope' or Shadow Self stood a few feet away from the sleeper. It was invisible, of course, to the eye. It was only located by striking the air and watching for the corresponding portion of the sleeper's body to recoil. By pricking a certain part of the Shadow Self with a pin, the cheek of the patient could be made to bleed. It was at that spot that the camera was focussed for fifteen minutes! The result was——"

"A spoiled film."

"No, the profile of a head!" contradicted Dr. McPherson.

Grimm stared at him wonderingly.

"And you actually *believe* such idiocy?" he demanded.

"It isn't a mere question of belief," declared McPherson, "but of absolute *knowledge*. De Roche, who took the picture, is not a fraud, but a lawyer of high standing. A room full of famous scientists saw the picture taken."

"If they were honest, they were hypnotised."

"Perhaps you think the camera was hypnotised, too," retorted the doctor. "Lombroso says that once under similar circumstances an unnatural current of cold air went through the room and lowered the thermometer several degrees. These are *facts*. Can you hypnotise a thermometer?"

"Oh, isn't that wonderful?" breathed Kathrien.

Grimm patted her shoulder gently, smiling as one might smile who sees a dearly loved child taken in by a wonder-story. Then he turned to McPherson, the banter in face and voice changed to mild reproof.

"No, Andrew," said he, reaching for his long meerschaum pipe and holding its coffee-brown bowl lovingly between his thick fingers, as he proceeded to fill it from a pouch on the mantel, "No, Andrew. I refuse your compact. I'll have no part or parcel in it. Because it's an impossible thing you ask of me. We don't come back. One cannot pick the lock of Heaven's gate. It is no part of our terms with the Almighty. God did enough for *us* when He gave us life and gave us the strength to work, and then gave us work to do. He owes us no explanation. I'll take my chances

on the old-fashioned Paradise—with a locked gate. No bogies for me."

With another reassuring smile at Kathrien as she went out with the tray of breakfast things, he lighted his pipe and repeated musingly:

"No bogies for me, I say. Who are *you* that you should take the Kingdom of Heaven by violence? Why," he broke out, "what ails you, man?"

CHAPTER V

A QUEER COMPACT

"HAVE you done?" rasped McPherson. "Have you quite done?"

"Why, what——?"

"Then listen to me. Abuse is not argument. Neither is silly mockery. I console myself with the thought that men have laughed at the theory of the earth going round, and at vaccination, and lightning rods, and magnetism, and daguerreotypes, and steamboats, and cars, and telephones, and at the theory of the circulation of the blood, and at wireless telegraphy, and at flying in the air. So your gibing is forgivable. *But*—I'm very, *very* much disappointed, Peter, that so old a friend should refuse such a simple request. I'll be wishing you a very good day."

"Hold on, Andrew! Hold on!" cried Grimm, hastily setting down his pipe and hurrying forward to intercept his angrily departing guest. "Man, man, can't you keep your temper? I didn't mean to rile you. Come back. If you take the thing so seriously, I'll—I'll make the compact with you.

Here's my hand on it. I know you're an old fool. And I'm another. So we're both in bad company. Shake hands. Now then! Whichever of us *does* go first is to come back and try to make himself known to the other. And——"

A fit of uncontrollable laughter cut across his words. The doctor frowned pettishly and made as though to turn away. But Peter still held his hand and would not let it go.

"There, Andrew!" he said remorsefully, as he wiped the laughter tears from his eyes. "I've riled you again. I'm sorry. We'll leave the matter this way: if I go first—and if I can come back, I *will* come back—and I'll apologise to you for being in the wrong. There! Does that satisfy you, Andrew? I say I'll come back and apologise."

"You mean it, Peter?" asked McPherson eagerly. "You're not joking?"

"No, I mean it. If I can, I'll come back. And if I come back I'll apologise to you. It's a deal. Now let's have a nip of my plum brandy to seal the compact."

"Good!"

"I'll step down to the cellar and get a fresh bottle of it. That one on the sideboard hasn't got

two man's size drinks left in it. I'll be back in a minute and then we'll drink to spooks. Especially to spooks that come back and apologise."

With a chuckle at his own odd conceit, he vanished cellarward. As the door closed behind him, Kathrien came in from the dining-room, where evidently she had been awaiting a chance for a word alone with McPherson.

"Doctor," she asked almost breathlessly, "do you really believe the dead can come back?"

"Why not?" demanded McPherson, beginning to bristle for a new argument. "Why shouldn't they?"

"But—you mean to say you could come back to this room if you were dead, and I could see you?"

"You might not see me. I don't say you could. But I could come back."

"And—and could you *talk* to me?"

"I think so."

"But, could I hear you?"

"That I don't know. You see, that's what we gropers after the light are trying to make possible. Hello!" he interrupted himself, in a none too pleased whisper. "*Here* are some people that can talk and that one can't help hearing!"

Ushered in by Willem, the Rev. Mr. Batholommey, the local Episcopal clergyman of Grimm Manor, and his placid, portly wife, swept in from the vestibule on clerical visitation bent.

"Good-morning, Doctor," sighed Mrs. Batholommey, comprising the whole sunlit room in one all-compassionate glance.

"Good-morning, Kathrien."

"Good-morning, Mrs. Batholommey," answered Kathrien, loudly enough to drown McPherson's growl of unwelcoming welcome. "Good-morning, Pastor. Oom Peter will be back directly. I'll tell him you're here."

She hurried out of the room. McPherson showed strong inclination to follow her. But Mrs. Batholommey had already singled him out for her prey and bore down upon him with a becomingly woe-begone face.

"Oh, Doctor," she panted, wiping her eyes. "Does he know it yet? *Does* he?"

"Does *who* know *what?*" snapped the doctor, his glance straying wrathfully toward the rotund clergyman, who all at once assumed an abjectly apologetic air and interested himself in a picture on the farther wall.

"Poor dear Mr. Grimm," pursued Mrs. Bath-

olommey. "Does he know he's going to die?"

Willem, who was halfway out of the room by this time, halted, turned back and, unobserved, stood listening with wide eyes and open mouth.

"What in blue blazes are you talking about?" thundered McPherson, glowering down on his rector's wife in a most unadmiring manner.

"About Mr. Grimm. Does he know yet that he must die?"

"Does the whole damned town know it?" roared the doctor.

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Batholommey in prim horror at the explosive adjective.

"You see, Doctor," put in the rector with urbane haste, before his spouse could recover breath to rebuke the blasphemer or return to the attack. "You see, it's this way: You consulted Mr. Grimm's lawyer. And his wife told *my* wife."

"Gabbed, did he?" snorted McPherson. "To perdition with the professional man who gabs to his wife!"

"Oh, Doctor!" expostulated Mrs. Batholommey. "How can——?"

"I am inexpressibly grieved," said her husband,

"to learn that Mr. Grimm has an incurable malady. And is it true that the nature of it is——?"

"The nature of the whole affair is *this*," returned McPherson. "He isn't to be told. Understand that, please. He must *not* know. I didn't say he had to die at once. He may outlive us all. He probably will. And, in any event, no one must speak to him about it."

"I should think," said Mrs. Batholommey in lofty rebuke, "that a man's rector might be allowed to talk to him on such a theme. It seems to me, Dr. McPherson, if *you* can't do any more, it's *his* turn. From the way you doctors assume control of everything, it's a wonder to me you don't want to baptise the babies, too."

"Rose!" murmured the doctor in mild reproof.

"At the last moment," Mrs. Batholommey insisted, ignoring her husband, "Mr. Grimm will want to make a will. And you know he *hasn't*. He'll want to remember the Episcopal Church of Grimm Manor, and his charities—and his—friends. If he doesn't, the rector will be blamed as usual. You're not doing right, Doctor, in keeping——"

"Rose! My dear!" interjected her husband. "These private matters——"

"But——"

"I'll trouble you, Mrs. Batholommey," shouted McPherson, "to attend to your own affairs, and——"

"Doctor!" bleated the rector.

"Oh, let him talk, Henry!" sniffed Mrs. Batholommey in semi-tearful exaltation. "I can bear it. Besides," coming to earth level, "no one in town pays any attention to what he says since he has taken up with spiritualism."

"Oh, Rose! My dear!"

"Shut up!" whispered McPherson wrathfully. "Here he comes. Remember what I——"

Peter Grimm put an end to the warning by reappearing from the cellar with a small demijohn in his hand. His face brightened into a smile of pleasant greeting as he saw his two new guests.

"Why," he exclaimed, "this is the jolliest sort of a surprise. I hope I haven't kept you waiting long?"

The rector and his wife glanced at each other in embarrassment. Mrs. Batholommey turned toward Peter with a lachrymose grimace, intended doubtless for a consoling smile, and seemed about to break into a torrent of speech. But the rector,

after a timid look at McPherson, nervously forestalled her by coming hurriedly to the front.

"Good-morning, dear friend," said he. "This is just a little impromptu visit of gratitude. We wish to thank you for the lovely flowers that Willem brought us a few minutes ago, and for the noble check you sent yesterday."

"Why," laughed Peter uncomfortably, "please don't even think of thanking me. I——"

"And," nervously pursued the rector, sparring for time, "I want to let you know how much we are still enjoying the delicious vegetables you so generously provided. I *did* relish that squash. If I were obliged to say offhand what my favourite vegetable is, I——"

"Pardon me," interposed Peter, his glance straying past the rector and resting with swift concern upon Mrs. Batholommey's quivering expanse of face, "but is anything distressing you, Mrs. Ba——?"

"No, no!" interjected the rector with break-neck haste.

"No, no!" responded Mrs. Batholommey in the same breath.

A half inaudible growl from Dr. McPherson completed the triple chord of negation. A chord

so explosive, so crassly out of keeping with the simple question that evoked it that Grimm stared amazed from one of the trio to another.

Willem, strolling from his retreat, crossed to the table, picked up a picture book, and in leisurely fashion mounted with it to the gallery landing that overlooked the room. There he threw himself on a settee between the bedroom doors and opened the book at random.

His lower lip quivered ever so little and his blue eyes were big with a troubled wonder. From time to time his glance would stray from the gaudy pages of the picture book down to Grimm in the room below. And each time the wonder in his eyes became tinged with a new sorrow.

Meantime, Peter Grimm's look of questioning, perplexed sympathy toward her tumult ridden self was becoming far too much for Mrs. Batholommey's jellylike self-control. The jelly began to quake—quite visibly.

"I was afraid," Peter went on kindly, "that something unpleasant might have happened. And I hoped perhaps I might be able——"

"Oh, no! No, no, *no!*" denied the utterly flustered woman. "I—I hope you are feeling well, Mr. Grimm. No—no—I don't mean that.

I—I don't mean that I hope you are *well.* Of course not. I—that is——"

"Of course she hopes it," boomed her husband, coming to the rescue with heavy and uncertain cheeriness that rang as false as the ring of a leaden dollar. "And of course *all* of us hope it, dear Mr. Grimm. With all our hearts. And we wish you many, *many* years of life and——"

"Oh, indeed we do," chimed in Mrs. Batholommey. "And, as Dr. McPherson just said, there may perhaps be no reason,—with proper care—why you shouldn't——"

"A blundering rector must be put up with because of his cloth. But when it comes to a blundering rectorette, there ought to be a line drawn!"

It was McPherson who said it. He addressed no one, but seemed to be confining his heretical sentiments to the window seat. Also he spoke in a gruff undertone—that filled the room like far off thunder.

Peter Grimm flung himself into the breach, even before the wave of outraged red could gush to Mrs. Batholommey's shaking visage.

"Will you—will you have a glass of plum brandy?" he asked her, and then caught himself with the scared grin of a very guilty schoolboy.

"I believe," said Peter irrelevantly, "that St. Paul was a single man, was he not, Pastor?"

"I thank you," she retorted, safe for the moment in the full majesty of Temperance. "I do not take such things. Perhaps you forget I am the President of our local W. C. T. U. and the——"

"The Little Brothers of the Artesian Well," added Grimm, "or whatever they call it. I remember. And I'm sorry. I wouldn't tempt you from your principles for the world. Forgive me. How about *you,* Pastor? A little drop of plum brandy, for—for—let's see, what is it St. Paul says about——?"

"Thank you, no," declined the rector, with an apprehensive gesture towards his wife.

"Oh, come, come!" urged Peter hospitably. "Why, the other evening when you dropped over here after the vespers, sir, you——"

"I only use it when absolutely needful for medicinal purposes," insisted the rector hurriedly. "Not to-day, I thank you."

"I believe," said Peter irrelevantly, "that St. Paul was a single man, was he not, Pastor?"

"I—I believe so. It is not definitely known. But why?"

"I was only wondering," mused Peter, "how he would have accounted to St. Pauline, or what-

ever his wife's name would have been, for what he wrote in favour of 'a little wine for—'"

"Oh," explained Mrs. Batholommey, still safe, and ever feeling safer, now that temperance was again the theme, "St. Paul referred to unfermented wine, you know. Every one ought to understand that. It is so hard to make people see the difference."

"One bottle would convince them," said Peter very gravely.

"No," Mrs. Batholommey corrected him with serene loftiness. "You do not quite get my point, dear Mr. Grimm. For instance, when the poets,—even good men like the late Mr. Longfellow and Mr. Whittier—speak of 'wine,' they use the word of course in its poetical sense. They use it merely to typify——"

"Booze," growled McPherson.

"Good cheer," amended Mrs. Batholommey, withering him with a single frown. "And yet it is terribly misleading. I remember when we had the Walter Scott Tableaux and Recitations at the church last fall, and old Mr. Bertholf from Pompton was going to recite 'Lochinvar,' I had to suggest a change in the poem, lest the ignorant people in the village might get a wrong impression of

dear Sir Walter Scott's principles. You remember the couplet occurs:

"'And now I have come with this lost love of mine
To tread one last measure, drink one cup of wine.'

"So I asked Mr. Bertholf to alter the words into something like this:

"'And now I have come with this beautiful maid
To tread one last measure,—drink one lemonade.'

"It left the poetry just as beautiful and it took away the dangerous reference to wine. Mr. Bertholf didn't like it very much, I'm afraid. But I insisted, and at last——"

"And at last," snarled McPherson, to whom the thought of any mutilation of his fellow Scotchman's verse was as sacrilege, "and at last, poor Bertholf got so mixed up that he clean forgot the silly rot you'd taught him. And when he came to that part of the poem, he stammered for a second and then blurted out:

"'And now I have come with my lovely lost mate
To tread one last measure, drink one whiskey straight.'"

"Yes," blazed Mrs. Batholommey, "and I have always believed *you* put him up to it."

"Well," shrugged the noncommittal McPherson, "if I had, it would at least be more in keep-

ing with what Sir Walter intended than your straining an immortal poem through a lemon-squeezer."

"Andrew and I," announced Peter, hastening to pour oil on the troubled waters of conversation, by filling two glasses and handing one of them to McPherson, "are going to drink a toast to spooks."

"*What?*" squealed Mrs. Batholommey, in the accents of a rabbit that has been stepped on.

"To spooks—we——"

"Oh, how *can* you?" she gasped. "How *can* you? To spooks! *You* of all men! The very idea!"

"Mrs. Batholommey!" exclaimed Peter in real alarm, setting down his glass and moving toward her. "Something *has* happened! You are quite——"

"No, no!" she wailed helplessly.

"It is nothing, Mr. Grimm," soothed the rector. "Nothing at all, I assure you. My wife is a trifle overwrought this morning. Nothing of any consequence. I mean—that is, of course—we must all keep our spirits up, Mr. Grimm."

"Good Lord, deliver us!" intoned McPherson in mingled fervour and disgust.

"I know what it is," declared Peter with sudden enlightenment. "You've just come from a wedding! That's it! I know. Women love weddings better than anything on earth. They'll talk about it for months beforehand. They'll walk miles to attend one.—And they'll weep all the rest of the day. I don't know why. But they do it. I should be grateful, I suppose, that no women were ever called upon to shed tears at *my* wedding. But I hope, before so very long——"

Mrs. Batholommey had not in the very least caught the drift of the laughing speech whereby he had sought to put the poor woman at her ease. And now all at once, the last sagging vestige of self-control went from her.

"Oh, Mr. Grimm!" she moaned, breaking in upon his words. "You were always so kind to us. There never was a better, kinder, gentler man in all this world than you were."

"Than I *was?*" asked Peter bewildered. "Is my character changing or——?"

"No, no!" she corrected herself flounderingly. "I don't mean that. I mean—I meant——"

Her gaze fluttered helplessly about the big room and chanced at last to fall upon the reading boy, asprawl on the gallery bench above them.

"I meant," she plunged along, "what would become of poor little Willem if you——?"

This time her glance was caught and transfixed by McPherson's furious glare, much as a great flopping beetle might be pierced by the sting of a wasp. Mrs. Batholommey prided herself upon her tact. That glare nerved her to another effort.

"You see," she shrilled, wildly and awkwardly clambering out of the slough, "it's fearful he had such a 'M.'"

"Such a 'M'?" queried Peter. "What does that mean?"

With a warning glance toward the absorbed boy she shaped her lips noiselessly into the word "Mother."

"Oh!" said Peter. "I understand. But——"

"She ought to have told Mr. Batholommey or me," went on Mrs. Batholommey, climbing still higher on to solid ground, "who the 'F' was."

"'F'? What does that mean?"

And again the rabbit-like lips shaped themselves into a soundless word, this time 'Father.'"

"Oh," grunted Peter, "the word you want isn't 'Father,' but 'Scoundrel!' Whoever he is——"

Willem flung aside his book and leaped to his feet as though his little body were galvanised.

The others looked at him in guilty dread, fearing he had heard and had somehow understood their awkwardly veiled allusions to his parentage. But they were mistaken. A sound, far more potent to every normal child's ear than the fiercest thunders of morality, had reached his keen senses as he lounged up there. And a moment later they all heard it.

It was the braying of a distant but steadily approaching brass band. With it came a confused but ever louder medley of shouts, handclapping, raucous voices, and the higher tones of delighted children. As Kathrien came running in at one door, followed by Marta, and Frederik sauntered in from the office, Willem rushed down the stairway and into the window seat, where he sprang upon a chair and craned his neck to see the stretch of village street beyond. Nearer and louder came the music and the attendant vocal Babel.

"It's the circus parade!" shouted Willem. "The one they tell about in the advertisements and pictures on the fences. I didn't know the parade would start so early. There come some of them now. Oh, look! Oom Peter! Look! It's a clown! See! He's coming right toward us!"

The band in full brazen force was discoursing a "Dutch Ditties" waltz as it turned the corner above. And now, the voices of the barkers were heard in the land.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," came the leathern tones of one unseen announcer, "one hour before the big show begins in the main tent we will give a grand free balloon ascension!"

"Remember," adjured a second Unseen, "one price admits you to all parts of the big show!"

"Lemo—lemo—ice cold lemonade—five cents a glass!" shouted a youthful vender.

"You ought to quaff one beaker of it to Sir Walter Scott's memory, Mrs. Batholommey," observed McPherson.

But the din of the oncoming parade drowned his voice. The whole roomful, from Marta down to Willem, were thronging into the bay window. They were all children again. A touch of circus had renewed their youth as by the wave of a magic wand. Willem broke into a cry of utter joy and pointed ecstatically at the open window.

The next moment a clown, white and vermilion of face, clad in the traditional white, black, and scarlet motley of his tribe, had leaped cat-like upon the window sill and swept the room with his

painted grin. In his hands he held a great bunch of variegated circus bills. Tossing a half-dozen of these at the feet of the all-absorbed spectators, he cried in high cracked falsetto:

"Well, *well, WELL!* Here we are again, good people! Billy Miller's Big Show! Larger—greater—grander than ever. Everything new! Come and see the wild animals! Hear the lions roar!"

Wheeling suddenly towards Mrs. Batholommey he pointed a whitened forefinger at her and broke into a truly frightful roar. The good lady jumped at least six inches from the ground.

"Steady, ma'am!" exhorted the clown. "I won't let him bite you! Come one, come all! Come see the diving deer! The human fly, Mademoiselle Zarella!" he added, addressing the rector. "She walks suspended from the ceiling! One ring and no confusion!" he confided to the delightedly smiling Peter. "And all for the price of admission! Remember the grand free exhibition one hour before the big show!"

He paused, catching sight of Willem for the first time. Now, it is a well-grounded tradition in one-ring circus life that no clown stays long in the business or scores a hit in it unless he is genu-

inely fond of children. Noting the all-absorbing bliss and adoration in Willem's wide eyes, the clown grinned at the boy in right brotherly fashion.

"Howdy!" said he cordially. "Shake!"

Marvelling, overcome with rapture, feeling as though the proffered honour was one far too wonderful to be real, Willem shyly extended his hand and met the friendly grasp of the flour-dusted fingers. The clown, striking an attitude, began in shrill, exaggerated diction, to chant the antiquated "Frog Opera" song:

"Uncle Rat has gone to town,—Ha-*H'M!*
Uncle Rat has gone to town,"

he sang on, addressing Willem,

"To buy his niece a wedding gown."

"Ha-*H'M!*" intoned Willem, delightedly; laughing aloud as he realised he was actually singing with a real live clown.

"What shall the wedding breakfast be?"

continued the clown, interrogating the equally youthful and delighted Peter Grimm. And this time more voices than Peter's and Willem's caught up the refrain:

"Ha-*H'm!*
Hard-boiled eggs and a cup of tea,"

sang the clown. And again from Willem and the rest came the answering:

"Ha-*H'm!*"

"Billy Miller's Big Show!" yelled the clown. "Come one, come all! So long, Sonny!"

He was gone. The others came back to earth. But Willem was still in the wonder clouds. It had been to him an experience to rehearse a thousand times, to dream over, to remember forever. Peter Grimm, reading the boy's thoughts as could only a heart that must ever be boyish, beckoned Willem to him, as Kathrien and Marta departed to their interrupted work in the dining-room and the rest looked half ashamed at their momentary excitement over so garish and trivial a thing.

"Willem!" called Grimm.

"*Ja,* Mynheer," answered the boy, coming slowly, his face still alight with his tremendous adventure of a moment ago.

"Willem," repeated Grimm, "you wouldn't care to go to that circus, would you? Wouldn't it be pretty stupid?"

"*Stupid!*" gasped the boy. "Oh!"

"Well," said Peter, "suppose you go, then?"

"Go? Really, Mynheer Grimm?"

"Go get the seats," ordered Grimm. "Here's the money. Get two *front* seats. *Two.* We'll both go. We'll make a night of it, you and I. We'll stay out till—till ten o'clock!"

The vision of this bliss was too much for Willem's English.

"Ekar, ekar na hat circus!" he babbled dazedly.

Then he rushed up impulsively to Peter and seized the big, kindly hand in both his own.

"Oh, Mynheer *Grimm!"* he squealed in ecstasy. "There ain't any one else like you in the world. And—and—when the other fellows laugh at your funny hat, *I* don't."

"What?" asked Grimm, perplexed. "Is my hat funny?"

The boy was vibrant with laughter, drunk with anticipation. But, momentarily straightening his glowing face with a cast of semi-gravity, he said:

"And—and—Mynheer Grimm—it's too bad you've got to die!"

CHAPTER VI

BREAKING THE NEWS

THERE was an instant of stark, palsied silence. The rector, his wife, and McPherson looked at the all-unconscious boy with dumb horror. A horror that for the time crowded out indignation. Frederik, ignorant as he was of any cause for emotion, was struck by the tense bearing of the trio and looked from one to the other with the air of the only man in the room who does not catch a joke's point.

Peter Grimm alone was not affected by Willem's words. He was used to the child's oddities, his alternating high spirits, and dashes of sadness; his old-fashioned phrases and his queer lapses. Grimm broke the ominous silence with an amused chuckle.

"Most people die, sooner or later, Willem," he answered, stroking the boy's shock of soft yellow hair. "I'll live to see you in the business though. And we'll go to dozens of circuses together, too. Don't worry your little head over your Oom Peter's dying. I——"

He paused. The electrified atmosphere gen-

erated by the three conspirators began to reach his non-sensitive brain. A quick glance at Mr. Batholommey and a second at the rector's wife confirmed his vague feeling that something was wrong. He turned back to Willem, in time to intercept a blighting scowl of warning the doctor was trying to flash to the boy.

"Willem," asked Grimm gently, "how did you happen to say such a queer thing just now? What made you think I'm going to die?"

A concerted and unintelligible interruption from the trio was voiced too late to prevent Willem's reply.

"*He* said so," replied the boy, pointing at McPherson.

Then he caught the doctor's annihilating frown. And, simultaneously the rector cried in stern admonition:

"Willem!"

Mrs. Batholommey, too, was making quite awful and wholly incomprehensible faces at him. Under the triple menace the boy wilted. Like every child, since Cain, he had a thousand times been reproved for things he had said or done in perfect innocence. In fact, the more unconscious the offence, the more dire was the reproof. Chil-

dren do not reason in such matters. It is enough for them to know they have said or done the wrong thing; without stopping to discover why or how that thing chanced to be wrong.

The non-linguist traveller in a foreign land cannot read the "Keep off the Grass" or "No Thoroughfare" signs. But the policeman's threatening club has a universal language that he understands and intuitively obeys. So Willem (ignorant of death save as an empty name that vaguely carried a note of sorrow, and wholly unaware why he should not have imparted the news of Grimm's coming demise), saw he had said something very terrible. And a look of abject panic came into his face.

But Grimm's hand was still on his head,—gentle, caressing, infinitely tender in its touch.

"No, don't stop the boy," commanded Peter, meeting the variously anguished glances of the others with a half smile that began and ended in the suddenly widened eyes. "Don't stop him. Only children speak the truth nowadays. It used to be 'children and fools.' But fools have learned to tell fool-lies, and they have left children the monopoly of truth telling. Go on, Willem. You heard the doctor say that I am going to——?"

Willem's fragile little body was trembling from head to foot. Under Mrs. Batholommey's distorted glare and threatening noiseless mouthings his puny courage had gone to pieces. Big tears began to roll down his cheeks. And noting the child's terror, Grimm fell to soothing him.

"There, there, *jounker,*" comforted Peter. "Don't let them frighten you. Oom Peter will stand by you. You haven't done anything wrong and nobody's going to scold you. Don't be scared."

Under the strangely gentle voice and the consoling touch of the rough, kindly hand, Willem's fears subsided. With Oom Peter on his side, he could brave the frowns of all Grimm Manor if need be. For who was so strong, so wise as Oom Peter?

Did not every one bend to his orders and come running to him for advice and aid, as troubled children seek out a loving father? The boy ceased to tremble. He looked up into Grimm's face for something that should confirm the words and the touch.

And he found it. The rugged old visage had never before been so kindly, so unruffled. And in the little eyes that could flash so obstinately

and irritably, there was nothing but friendliness.

Yes—something more that the boy had never before seen. Something he could not read, but that seemed to draw him strangely close to the old man, and freed him of his last vestige of fear.

"Don't be scared, dear lad," repeated Grimm. "So you heard Dr. McPherson say I am going to die?"

"Yes, sir."

Grimm turned slowly to the doctor, who still stood glowering, red, speechless, furiously miserable.

"Andrew," asked Grimm quietly, "what did you mean?"

Before McPherson could speak, Grimm checked him with a move of the head and glanced down at the boy.

"Never mind just now," said he. "Willem didn't mean any harm in telling me. It just popped out, didn't it, Willem? The only person who never says the wrong thing at the wrong time is a deaf mute whose fingers are paralysed. We'll forget all about it. Now run along, lad, and get those circus tickets before all the best ones are gone. Front row seats, remember. We're go-

ing to have the finest sort of a spree, you and I. Hurry now."

"*Ja,* Oom Peter!" cried the boy, all laughter once more.

He snatched his cap from the rack, in his haste almost upsetting Grimm's antiquated tile that hung beside it; and, with a farewell shout, was gone. His feet padded joyously on the gravel outside; then silence fell again in the big room. It was Mr. Batholommey who broke the spell. Walking solemnly up to Peter, who stood looking with a sort of stunned wistfulness straight in front of him, the rector held out his hand.

"Good-bye, dear brave friend," he said, with an air gruesomely if unconsciously reminiscent of his burial service manner. "Any time you telephone for me, day or night, I'll run over *immediately.* God bless you, sir!" his rounded voice shaking uncontrollably. "I have never come to you in behalf of any worthy charity and been refused. You have set an example in upright living, in generosity, in true manliness, and in constant church attendance that should be an example to all my vestrymen and to the town at large. I have never seen a nobler man. Never. Good—good-morning."

He moved toward the door, winking very fast and clearing his throat. At the threshold he beckoned to his wife. But she had already borne down upon Peter.

"Mr. Grimm!" she sobbed. "The best—the kindest—the—the—Oh, I *don't* see how we are going to bear it."

"Dear Mrs. Batholommey," answered Grimm. "Please don't be so overcome. I may outlive you all. Nevertheless, I am grateful to your husband for letting me hear my funeral eulogy in advance, and to you for——"

"Oh, how *can* you make light of it?" she sobbed. "Yes, dear, I'm coming. Good-bye, Mr. Grimm."

Like a confused and somewhat elderly hen she scuttled off in her husband's wake, while Peter Grimm stared after the two with a half-amused, half-perplexed smile.

"Of all the wall-eyed, semi-anthropoid congenital idiots," roared McPherson as the door closed behind them, "those two are——"

"You're mistaken, Andrew," contradicted Grimm. "They're kind-hearted, good people, who spend their lives and their substance in helping others. If you and they can't get on together

it's no one's fault. Any more than because fuchsias and sunflowers won't thrive in the same bed. Now calm down a bit, old friend, and tell me——"

"Nothing! It was nothing. Just nonsense. Don't give it another thought, Peter. You said, yourself, a while ago, that many a man who was given up by the doctors at twenty-five lives to be a hundred. And there is no reason on earth why you——"

"Don't!" urged Grimm. "I don't need that. I——"

"Don't fret yourself, Peter," insisted McPherson. "You mustn't get the idea that you are worse off than you really are. Don't get cold feet or let this thing worry you to death. You must live for——"

"Andrew!" chided Grimm, with tolerant reproof. "Are you so tangled up that you think you're talking to Willem instead of to a full-grown man? If it's got to be, it's got to be. And you were wrong not to tell me at once. That is the way with you doctors. You are so in the habit of dealing with hysterical women and hypochondriacs that you forget that a *man* is shaped by nature to bear the naked truth without having it

rigged up beforehand in a lot of fluff to disguise its shape. I think I understand. I may live a while longer. And I may not. The same thing could be said of every one."

McPherson tried to speak, then turned and made blindly for the door.

"Wait a minute!" called Grimm.

McPherson halted. Peter crossed to where his friend stood. With an effort at his old-time whimsical banter he held out his hand.

"I just want to promise again, Andrew," he said, "that if there's anything in this spook business of yours, I'll come back. And I'll apologise. Good-bye and good luck."

McPherson wrung his hand, without speaking, and strode noisily out.

CHAPTER VII

THE HAND RELAXES

PETER GRIMM walked slowly back into the room. He paused at his desk and laid his hand on a sheaf of papers piled there. He looked about the big sunlit apartment almost as if he were trying to stamp the image of each of its familiar, pleasant features upon his memory.

Frederik, in the window seat, had been a silent onlooker to the strange scene. His pallid, thin face was set in an aspect of grieved wonder. And Peter Grimm, meeting his glance, sought to soften the young man's sorrow.

"Brace up, Fritzy," he said gaily. "It's nothing to look so down-in-the-mouth about. Doctors are apt to be wrong. They guess too much. When the guess is right they win a reputation for wisdom. When it's wrong—as it is nine times out of eight,—they say they knew it all along but thought it wasn't wise to tell the patient and his friends. Doctoring is a grand game,—for the man who has no sense of humour and can play it with a straight face. Now let's forget old An-

drew's croakings. Go and get me some change for the circus, Fritzy. Enough for Willem and me to buy all the red-ink lemonade and popcorn and peanuts and candy we can eat. Get me a whole dollar, anyhow. And then, if there's any left over after the show, I can——"

"Oh, sir!" cried Frederik protestingly. "Are you going after all, Uncle? And with that child? Do you think it's wise to——?"

"Wise?" echoed Peter gleefully. "Of course it isn't wise. That's the glory of a circus. It's almost the one place where people can go and forget they were ever meant to be wise. And that's why I am going. That and because I wouldn't disappoint Willem. Miss a circus? Miss Billy Miller's Big Show? Not I. *You* may be too old for such follies, Fritz. But I'll never be."

"But, sir," said Frederik, "in case you should be taken ill——"

"I won't be."

"With no companion but that half-witted——"

"Willem is not half-witted. He has as much sense as any boy of his age. And more, in many ways. Why do you dislike him so, Fritz?"

"Dislike him?" echoed Frederik uneasily. "I don't. Why should I?"

"When you came back from Europe and found him living with us," pursued Grimm, "you seemed annoyed. He tried to make friends with you at first. But you seemed always to rebuff him. Why? He's a lovable, interesting little chap. One would think you had some strong prejudice against him—or some reason——"

"Why, of course not. How could I have? The boy is nothing to me, one way or another, Uncle. As you're so fond of him, I'd be glad to do anything I could for him. As there's nothing I *can* do, and as he seems actually afraid of me, for some silly childish reason or other, I let him alone."

Grimm's attention had already wandered and that same new look which Willem had first detected crept back into his lined face. But the sight of Kathrien coming in from her preparations for the one o'clock dinner brought him back to himself.

"Katje!" he hailed her. "Do you want to go to the circus with Willem and me?"

"*Ja!*" she laughed joyously. "*Natürlich.*"

"Good! One more member of the family who

is no more grown up than I am! I want to see Mademoiselle Zarella, the human fly, and——"

He stopped to light the big meerschaum he had just filled. Then, going over to his favourite big armchair—a Dutch importation of a hundred years earlier, with pulpit back and high solid arms —he settled himself comfortably in it.

Peter Grimm was tired. And he wanted to think over the news he had so recently heard;—to dissect and analyse it and, if need be, to adjust himself to its awesome import. He sat back with half-closed eyes, puffing now and then mechanically at his pipe, his veiled glance resting here, there, and everywhere among the surroundings he loved.

The stable clock chimed the noon hour. The big, slow-swinging arms of the windmill slackened motion and stood still. A hush was in the air. The warm, lazy, wonderful hush of summer noon.

The midday sunlight gushed in unchecked through the wide windows, flooding the room with a glory of hazy golden light; bathing the dark old furniture with tints of rich warmth; glowing upon the roses that were arranged on desk and piano.

The Dutch clock on the wall struck twelve. A

moment later, the little clock on the mantel jinglingly endorsed the sentiment. Then, save for the drowsy droning of the bees among the blossoms outside the open windows, there was no sound in all Grimm's world.

Even Kathrien and Frederik seemed silenced by the spell of summer noon magic. The girl was looking out across the sun-kissed gardens. Frederik was eyeing her in complacent satisfaction, his nimble brain busy with the tidings that might mean so much for him.

Kathrien turned from the window at last and seated herself idly at the piano. Her slender fingers drifted half-aimlessly over the keys. Frederik lounged over to the piano and stood looking down at her.

Presently she began to sing. Frederik joined in the song and their young voices blended sweetly in the old Dutch and English words:

"*Van een twee, een twee, nu*
Ste-ken wij van wal:
The bird so free in the heavens
Is but the slave of the nest.
For all must toil as God wills it,
Must laugh and toil and rest.

"The rose must blow in the gardens,
The bee must gather its store.
The cat must watch the mousehole,
And the dog must guard the door!"

As the voices died away, Peter Grimm came out of his tortuous reverie. He had reached a decision. And, having once made up his mind, he was not a man to delay the execution of any plan.

"Katje!" he called, with sharp eagerness.

Startled at his unwonted tone, the girl hurried across to him.

"Yes, Oom Peter?" she asked.

"Get me—the Staaten Bible, please. Quickly."

Wondering at the peremptory tone of the familiar request, Kathrien obeyed, bringing the heavy old book to the table at his side; and opening it, from long habit, at the closely written pages of the Grimm family genealogy.

"There!" said Peter, running his finger down the last record page until it stopped at the blank space just below his own name.

"Frederik!" he called. "Come here."

The young people stood, one at each side of his chair, awaiting the next move, more than a little astonished at the unwonted haste and eagerness in his tone.

"Katje," went on Grimm, almost feverishly, as he pointed again at the blank line beneath his birth announcement, "I want to see you married and happy."

"I *am* happy, Uncle," she protested, "and——"

"And I want to see you happily *married,*" he said.

"I—I don't know," she faltered. "I——"

"But *I* know for you, little girl," he insisted, tapping the open page. "And under my name here, I want to see written: '*Married:—Kathrien and Frederik.*' You will do as I wish, dear? It would make me so happy!"

"Why, Oom Peter," she faltered in distress, "of course there isn't anything I wouldn't do—gladly—to make you happy. But——"

"Kitty," urged Frederik, "you know I love you! You know——"

"Yes, yes, yes. Certainly she does," snapped Grimm, fretted at the interruption. "Everybody knows that."

Grimm caught the girl's look of dumb entreaty, misread it, manlike, and hurried on:

"Come, girl, we've no time to be coy. Promise me you'll consent, Katje. We'll make it a June wedding. We have ten days yet. And——"

"Oh, I *couldn't!*" protested the poor girl. "*Really,* I couldn't."

"Nonsense, little girl. It's the easiest thing

in the world to get ready to be happy. Ten days is plenty. And you——"

"We can get your trousseau later," put in Frederik eagerly.

"Fritz!" cried the old man, exasperated. "*Will* you keep out of this? Who is managing it? You or I? In ten days, then, Katje? *Please!*"

"Why," she stammered, wretchedly at a loss, "if it will make you so happy, Oom Peter—if it means so much to you——"

"It does. It *does!*"

"I owe everything to you——"

"Then give me the privilege of seeing you a happy, contented wife, and we will write 'Paid' across the bill."

"But why need I marry so terribly soon?"

"To gratify a cranky old man's whim, Katje. It means more to me than I can tell you. Frederik understands."

She looked from one to the other. On each face she read a fatuous eagerness. She knew the futility of pleading with Frederik. She knew still more surely the uselessness of trying to make Peter Grimm change his stubborn wishes. With a little catch in her breath, she gave up the hopeless, unequal fight.

"Very well," she assented.

"You will do it?" cried Peter Grimm joyfully.

"Yes, I—promise," she answered; and her voice was dead.

"Good!" sighed Grimm, as he picked up his pipe and leaned back again in the big chair's recesses, a smile of utter peace and contentment irradiating his square old face. "You've made me very, *very* happy, Katje," he murmured, his eyes half-shut, his words trailing away almost into incoherence. "Very, very happy. I'm happier than ever I was in all my life—happier than ever I dreamed a man could be. I——"

He ceased to speak. The light on his face grew brighter, then slowly faded as a peaceful summer day fades. He settled a little lower in his chair and lay back there, very still. The gnarled hand that held the meerschaum relaxed.

The pipe fell clattering to the floor. Frederik stooped to pick it up. Kathrien, her eyes chancing to fall on Grimm's face, cried aloud in horror.

Frederik followed the direction of her gaze. He sprang toward his uncle, laid a hand over the old man's heart, and bent down toward the still, grey face that was upturned to his.

"Good God, Kitty!" he gasped. "He's *dead!*"

The girl had already flown toward the front door. Jerking it open she ran out on the steps. As she did so, she caught sight of McPherson coming away from a professional call at a house across the street.

"Doctor!" screamed Kathrien frantically. "*Doctor!*"

McPherson, next moment, had pushed past her into the living-room. Kneeling beside Grimm's body he made a swift examination.

As he rose to face the others, Willem burst into the house.

"Oom Peter! Oom Peter!" shrilled the child happily. "I got them!"

"Hush!" exclaimed McPherson.

The boy halted in the doorway, looking in puzzled dismay at the huddled form in the chair.

"What—what is——?" he began.

"He is dead," replied Frederik shortly.

Willem stood aghast for a second, while the curt announcement sank into his senses. Then in a burst of angry, rebellious wonder, the child cried:

"Dead? He can't be. He *can't!* Why, I've got our circus tickets!"

Act I

CHAPTER VIII

AFTERWARD

GRIMM MANOR was in mourning. And, far more to the dead man's honour, Grimm Manor *was* mourning.

The last of the ancient line was dead. The Grimms had been the ruling spirits in the drowsy little up-State town for more than two centuries. From father to son, the hierarchy had been handed down.

In days when the district was a wilderness and when the Grimms fought wild animal and Indian, and in the days when it was a prosperous suburb and the Grimms fought "scale" and locust, it had been the same:—ever a Grimm had swayed the little community.

Quiet in spite of his eccentric ways and dress, Peter Grimm had been known chiefly as a kindly neighbour and a shrewd business man. But now, after his death, all sorts and conditions of people came forward with queer stories of his private dealings.

There was a crotchety old Civil War veteran,

for instance, who lived "on the Mountain" and who was a reputed miser. He now told how Peter Grimm had eked out his $8 a month pension for the past forty years and had made it possible for him to live in comfort. A crippled woman who, with her four children, had at one time seemed likely to become a public charge and who had been relieved in the nick of time by a legacy, now told the real source of that providential "legacy."

A farm boy who had yearned to study engineering and who had been helped unexpectedly by a secret fund, revealed the name of the fund's donor.

A market gardener whose house, barns, and horses had been destroyed by fire, proclaimed that insurance had not enabled him to make good his loss. For he had not been insured. Peter Grimm had set him on his feet again. And as in every other case, Grimm had imposed but one condition upon the gift:—absolute secrecy.

These were but a few cases out of dozens that were made known within the week after Grimm's death.

The little stone church of Grimm Manor was packed to the doors on the day that six big awkward men with tear blotched faces bore a

silent burden up its aisle. A burden so covered with masses of fragrant blossoms as to blot out its gruesome oblong shape. The flowers were from Peter Grimm's own gardens, then in the riot of their June-tide glory.

And so, covered and drifted over with the glowing blooms he loved so well, the dead man went to his burial.

In the Grimm pew, with its silver plate and high, box-like sides, sat Frederik, Kathrien, and old Marta. The heir was as woe begone of face and as crassly sombre of raiment as even the most captious could have desired. The unostentatious pressure of his black bordered handkerchief to his eyes once or twice during the service attested to a sorrow that could not be kept wholly within stoic bounds.

Yet, oddly enough, it was Kathrien,—rather than Frederik or the frankly blubbering old housekeeper,—on whom people's eyes most often rested —rested and then dimmed with a haze of sympathy. The girl did not weep. Her face was very pale. But it was set and expressionless. Save for its big eyes it seemed a lifeless mask. The eyes alone were alive. And never for one instant did they move from the flower banked

casket in front of the altar rail. They were tearless. But in their soft depths lurked the awed, unbelieving horror of a little child's that is for the first time brought face to face with the Black Half of life.

Kathrien was not in mourning. Her simple white dress caused no comment. For, by this time, it was known she was acting on what she believed to be Grimm's wishes. The dead man had ever had a loathing of all the hideous visible trappings of grief. He had been wont to hold forth on his aversion after every funeral he had been forced to attend.

"When it comes my time to fall asleep," he had said, during one of these Philippics, "I don't want anybody that cares for me to make death horrible by going around dressed like an undertaker. I'd as soon expect a mother to put on black after she had kissed her child good-night. There'd be just as much sense in it. If it's done because we're grieved to think where our friends have gone,—well and good. But if we're willing to give them the benefit of the doubt, why dress as if we were sorry for them?"

Wherefore, Kathrien was wearing one of the white summer dresses he had loved. She had tim-

idly suggested that Frederik also honour the dead man's prejudices. But the sad, reproachful look he had bent upon her at her first hint of the subject had silenced the girl and had left her half-convicted of heartlessness because of her own avoidance of black.

Willem was not at the funeral. After that first strange outburst on learning that Grimm was dead, the child had said no word all day. At night when Kathrien came to take him to bed, she found him in a high fever.

Dr. McPherson had been sent for, and had examined the child closely, but could find no palpable cause for the malady.

"He's an odd little fellow," he told Kathrien. "Like no other boy I've ever known. The Scotch call such children 'fey' and prophesy short lives for them. And the prophecy usually comes true. There's always been something psychic about Willem. A hypnotist or a medium would look on him as a treasure.

"All the diagnosis I can make is that Peter's death caused a shock to the boy's never strong nerves and that the shock has caused the fever. Keep him in bed for a few days. He'll probably come around all right. There doesn't seem to

be anything really serious—except that in a constitution like his everything is apt to be more or less serious."

After the funeral, life went on outwardly much as before at the Grimm home. The only change was the impalpable one which occurs in a room when a clock stops.

And, in fulfilment of Peter Grimm's last request, preparations for the "June wedding" were begun. It was Frederik who tactfully broached the theme. Kathrien, after a look of helpless fear, nodded acquiescence.

"I promised him," she said faintly. "And he died while the promise was still scarcely spoken. The smile of happiness it brought to his dear old face was on it when they laid him to sleep. I *couldn't* break that promise."

"And you wouldn't, if you could. I know that," said Frederik tenderly. "Dear one, I would not urge the wedding at a time like this if it had not been his last wish that we should be married this very month."

"Yes," she agreed lifelessly. "It was his wish. And we must do it."

And with this unenthusiastic assent Frederik was forced to be satisfied. So the preparations

were pushed on with a furtive, almost apologetic, haste.

Mrs. Batholommey entered into the spirit of the affair with a lugubrious zest that would have sickened Kathrien had it not taken so much of the burden of arrangement-making off her own tired young shoulders.

It was to Frederik and Mrs. Batholommey that every one at length turned for directions in details for the wedding, not to the still-faced girl who seemed to know or to care nothing about the way matters were to be conducted.

And this gave Kathrien surcease,—a breathing space wherein to try to think with a brain from which sorrow had driven the power of clear thought; a time to plan, to *realise,* to remember, —with faculties too numb to carry out the will power's intent. The days crept past her like shadows. And the wedding day drew near. But still she could not wholly rouse herself from the dumb inertia that gripped her.

CHAPTER IX

THE EVE OF A WEDDING

TEN days later the household, which had been Peter Grimm's and was his no longer, had sufficiently adjusted itself to new conditions to endeavour to carry out his dearest wish—the marriage of Kathrien to Frederik.

It was near the close of a rainy afternoon, and Mrs. Batholommey (installed in the house as temporary chaperone and adviser to Kathrien) was busily engaged in drilling four little girls from her own Sunday-school class to sing the Bridal Chorus from Lohengrin.

Standing at the piano, and playing with a sure, determined touch, she gazed over her shoulder at the children and sang vigorously, nodding her head to emphasise the tempo:

> "Faithful and true we lead ye forth
> Where love triumphant shall lead the way.
> Bright star of love, flower of the earth,
> Shine on ye both on your love's perfect day."

As the last line was reached, Mrs. Batholommey raised her hand in a signal to stop.

"That's better. Now, children—not too loud. Remember, this is a very *quiet* wedding. You're to be here at noon to-morrow. You mustn't speak as you enter the room, and take your places near the piano. Now we'll sing as though the bride were here. I'll represent the bride."

Mrs. Batholommey pointed at Kathrien's door as she spoke, and started toward it with subdued but undeniable enthusiasm.

"Miss Kathrien will come down the stairs from her room, I suppose—and will stand—I don't know where—but you've got to stop when I look at you. Watch me now——"

Bending her knees, she stood bobbing up and down in time to the children's singing, until she caught the step, then started down the stairs, unconsciously raising and lowering her dress skirt to emphasise the rhythm of the song.

Across the room she marched, head bent and eyes cast down, while the children repeated the familiar verse over and over.

Having marched herself into a corner she halted and faced the little singers. At that moment, however, Frederik entered, and the rehearsal was over for the day. Mrs. Batholommey quickly

left her rôle of bride and dismissed the chorus with many warnings and instructions.

"That will do, children. Hurry home between showers and don't forget what I've told you about to-morrow!"

While she busied herself helping them into their rubbers and waterproofs, Frederik puffed at a cigarette in silence and was seemingly without the slightest interest in what was going on around him. A great change had taken place in his demeanour since his uncle's death. He had come into his own. The place, and everything, including Kathrien herself, would be his. He did not even try to veil his feeling of mastership. Walking over to his uncle's desk-chair, he sat down and began to pull off his gloves, looking at the children a trifle superciliously.

Mrs. Batholommey felt it necessary to explain, and murmured with deprecatory haste:

"My Sunday-school children. I thought your dear uncle wouldn't like it if he knew there wasn't going to be *any* singing during the marriage ceremony to-morrow. I know how bright and cheery *he* liked everything," she purred. "If he were alive it would be a church wedding! Dear, happy, charitable soul!"

As she spoke she handed the children their umbrellas and, exchanging good-byes, the little choir hurried out into the rain.

"Where's Kathrien?" said Frederik.

"Still upstairs with Willem," answered Mrs. Batholommey, glancing up toward the little boy's room apprehensively as she spoke, and lowering her voice a bit.

Frederik made an inarticulate sound of annoyance, and putting his hand into his pocket, took out two steamer tickets and examined them. His one idea was to get away from the simple, quaint surroundings that his uncle had kept and beautified for him in the fond, proud hope that his nephew would love and care for the place as he had done.

To Frederik it meant nothing but a humdrum existence, full of annoying detail. The money for which it stood had been his goal—that, and Kathrien, his uncle's very brightest flower—a flower which he was about to tear up by the roots and transplant to foreign soil.

Mrs. Batholommey sat down in the big chair by the fire, and took up her crochet work with a sigh. Occasionally she looked at Frederik, and finally she spoke.

"Of course I'm glad to stay here and chaperone Kathrien; but poor Mr. Batholommey has been alone at the parsonage for ten days—ever since your dear uncle—it will be ten days to-morrow since he di—oh, by the way, some mail came for your uncle. I put it in the drawer."

Frederik did not trouble to answer. He merely nodded.

"Curious how long before people know a man's gone," soliloquised Mrs. Batholommey.

Opening the drawer carelessly Frederik took out his uncle's mail—two business letters and one in a plain blue envelope. He looked at them a moment, put them down, and proceeded to light another cigarette. Then he rose, and picking up his gloves looked toward the office.

"Did Hartmann come?" he said.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Batholommey, holding up a corner of the shawl she was crocheting, and surveying it critically. With a coquettish glance toward the bridegroom, she hummed a little bit of the wedding march.

Frederik paid no attention to her, but, turning, gazed out of the window. Mrs. Batholommey, however, as the wife of a clergyman, was not used to being ignored; moreover, she was naturally

of a persevering disposition—and, added to that, she had something on her mind and could keep still about it no longer.

"Er——" (Mrs. Batholommey coughed expressively.) "By the way, Mr. Batholommey was very much excited when he heard that your uncle had left a personal memorandum concerning *us*. We're anxious to have it read."

She might as well have addressed herself to a stone. Frederik made no sort of a response. Instead, he lounged over to the piano and examined some of the wedding presents piled up there.

Mrs. Batholommey rose with decision and approached the piano.

"We are anxious to have it read!"

No answer.

With a scorching glance at Frederik, Mrs. Batholommey, her work gathered in a fluffy white bunch in her arms, marched quickly out of the room and slammed the door.

A moment later James, newly returned from the South, entered the room from the office. Frederik had found it impossible to get on without him in the matter of winding up his uncle's business and had sent an urgent and somewhat peremptory call for his immediate return.

As, just then, he needed James, he was rather more civil to him than usual; but, from the first, he did not fail to sound the employer-employee note.

He came forward and shook hands cordially.

"Good-afternoon. Good-afternoon. How do you do, Hartmann? I'm very glad you consented to come back and straighten out a few matters. Naturally, there's some business correspondence I don't understand."

"I've already gone over some of it," answered Hartmann.

"I appreciate the fact that you came over on my *uncle's* account."

So saying, Frederik turned away with a ceremonious bow.

Hartmann went over to the desk and took a letter from the file. Then he said coldly:

"Oh, I see that Hicks of Rochester has written you. I hope you don't intend to sell out your uncle before his monument is set up."

Frederik turned toward Hartmann and put down his cigarette.

"I? Sell out? My intention is to carry out every wish of my dear uncle's."

James, at this moment catching sight of Fred-

erik's black-bordered handkerchief, said sceptically:

"I hope so," and vanished into the office with a handful of papers.

He wished as few words as possible with Frederik. He could not bear to look at him—for the thought that to-morrow Kathrien was to marry the man and go out of his own life for all time was almost more than he could stand. He had watched her grow from a lovely little girl to a lovelier woman—he understood her as did no one else, not even Oom Peter, who, too, had loved her so devotedly.

And he felt that she loved him, though no word had ever been said. And now—he must let her go—he must let this worthless fellow take her—to a life of unhappiness; for knowing the sweet soul of Kathrien, who could doubt that such a marriage would bring her unhappiness?

Frederik's eyes rested thoughtfully on Hartmann's retreating figure. Then a slight sound attracted his attention, and he looked up in time to see Kathrien coming downstairs. Her simple white dress held no touch of mourning, yet she was a wistful, pathetic little figure, full of sadness.

"Ah, Kitty! See——" (taking out the tickets

as he spoke). "Here's the steamship tickets for Europe. I've arranged everything."

He took a step forward to meet her.

"Well, to-morrow's our wedding day, *lievling*, yes?"

"Yes," answered Kathrien in a breathless way.

"It'll be a June wedding," Frederik went on, "just as Oom Peter wished."

Kathrien forced herself to speak brightly.

"Yes—just as he wished. Everything is just as he——" she broke off suddenly with a change of manner, and gazed at Frederik with beseeching earnestness.

"Frederik, I don't want to go away. I don't want to take this journey to Europe. If only I could stay quietly in—in my own dear home!"

CHAPTER X

A WASTED PLEA

FREDERIK concealed his annoyance as best he could, and smiled affectionately at the little bride-to-be, trying to coax her out of her mood. He looked around the familiar room a bit scornfully.

"Huh! This old cottage with its candles and lamps and shadows! What does it amount to? Wait until I've shown you the home I *want* you to have—the house Mrs. Frederik Grimm *should* live in."

He patted her arm once or twice as he spoke, to give further weight to his words; but they seemed lost on Kathrien. Her eyes grew more and more troubled and her sweet face increasingly wistful.

"I don't want to leave this house," she said. "I don't want any home but this. I should be wretched if you took me away."

As she spoke, she glanced helplessly at the fresh flowers on Oom Peter's desk, placed there daily by her faithful, loving little fingers.

"I'm sure Oom Peter would like to think of me as here, among our dear, dear flowers!"

Frederik tried to reassure her as one does a child, and answered soothingly:

"Of course—but what you need is a change, yes?"

Kathrien turned away and traced a pattern on the newel post with her slender fingers. She found it very hard to talk. After a moment, she went on:

"I—I've always wanted to please Oom Peter. —I always felt that I owed everything to him—if he had lived and I could have seen his happiness over our marriage, that would have made *me* happy, almost. But he's gone—and every day—the longer he's away from me, the more I see for myself that I don't feel toward you as I ought. You know it. But I want to tell you again. I'm perfectly willing to marry you. Only—I'm afraid I can't make you happy."

Looking at him with sorrowful, perplexed eyes, she went on:

"It's so disloyal to speak like this after I promised *him;* but, Frederik, it's *true.*"

Frederik found it hard to keep his patience; yet he continued to reason with Kathrien in a voice

even gentler than before, though with an accent of finality in it that she could not disregard as he said:

"But you *did* promise Uncle Peter you'd marry me, yes?"

Her answering "Yes" was barely audible.

Frederik continued insistently:

"And he died believing you, yes?"

Kathrien merely nodded; she could not look at him, could not speak. After a moment she went on, her eyes still averted:

"That's what makes me try to live up to it. Still, I cannot help feeling that if Oom Peter knew how hard everything seems—how alone I feel——"

"You are not alone while I am here, *lievling*——"

Kathrien smiled pathetically.

"You don't understand, Frederik. You mean to be kind—and you *are* kind. And I thank you for it; but if only my mother had lived! As long as dear Oom Peter was here he was father, mother, everything to me. I felt no lack; but now—oh, I want my mother to turn to——"

The girl's eyes were suddenly suffused with tears.

"Don't you *see?* *Try* to know how I feel.—Try to understand——"

Suddenly Frederik stopped her torrent of words. He took her in his arms before she realised it, and, kissing her, he said:

"*Natürlich*—I understand. I love you—and in time—Wait! You shall see! You must not worry, sweetheart. These things will come right, all in good time."

But Kathrien had released herself with nervous if quiet haste.

"Willem is feeling so much better," she said, with a change of tone to the ordinary.

"*Tc!*"

With his usual display of annoyance at the mention of Willem, Frederik left Kathrien and walked over to Oom Peter's desk, where he began to pick up and lay down the various articles strewn about its surface; without in the least realising what he was doing.

"I do hope that child will be kept out of the way—to-morrow," he said roughly.

"Why?"

"Oh—oh, I——"

Frederik found it hard to tell why.

"You have always disliked poor little Willem, haven't you?" demanded Kathrien.

"N—no——" answered Frederik. "But——"

His nervousness was very evident as he still moved fussily about the desk.

"*Yes, you have,*" continued Kathrien calmly. "I remember how angry you were when you came back from Leyden University and found him living here. How could you help being drawn to a little blue-eyed, golden-haired baby such as he was then?—Only five years old, and such a darling! He won us all at once, except you. And in all the three years he has been here, we've only grown more and more fond of him each day. You love children—you go out of your way to pick up a child and pet it. Why do you dislike Anne Marie's little boy?"

"Oh!" cried Frederik impatiently, "he has a way of staring at people as though he had a perpetual question on his lips——"

He was interrupted by a vivid flash of lightning and a long roll of thunder.

"Oh, a little child!" said Kathrien reproachfully. "He has only kindness from everybody. Why shouldn't he look at one?"

"And then his mother!" went on Frederik,

gazing into the fire, while the rain, steadily increasing with the nearer approach of thunder and lightning, blotted away the pleasant landscape outside the windows.

"Uncle and I loved Anne Marie, and we had forgiven her. Why should *you* blame her so bitterly? Surely she has suffered enough to expiate——"

"I don't want to be hard upon any woman. I've never seen her since she left the house, but—Hear that rain! It's pouring again! The third day. You're wise to have a fire in here. This old house would be damp otherwise in a long storm like this. By the way, Hartmann is back for a few hours to straighten things out—I'm going to see what he's doing."

Frederik went up to Kathrien, and putting his arms about her, led her up to the piano, saying:

"Kitty, have you seen all the wedding presents? Wait for me a while here and look at them till I come back. I'll be with you again in a few minutes."

Smiling, and giving her cheek a tender pat, he left her alone.

As she stood there, surrounded by all her gay presents, she looked anything but the picture of a happy bride. Giving no thoughts to the gifts, she

stood, motionless, her eyes slowly filling with tears.

Suddenly the outer door slammed, and a moment afterward Dr. McPherson entered. His tweed shawl and cap proclaimed the recent violence of the storm as he hurriedly took them off and hung them up, and placed his soaked umbrella in the rack. With a book under his arm, he came quickly toward the girl, saying:

"Good-evening, Kathrien. How's Willem?"

Kathrien tried to hide her tears; but it was impossible to elude the keen eyes of Dr. McPherson. In one quick glance he caught the situation.

"What's the matter?" he said curtly.

"Nothing," said Kathrien in a voice whose tremble she could not control; yet bravely wiping away her tears as she spoke. "I was only thinking—I was hoping that those we love—and lose—can't see us here. I'm beginning to believe there's not much happiness in *this* world."

The doctor looked at her with affectionate reproof, much as if she had been a naughty child.

"Why, you little snip!" he said whimsically, as he pulled her toward him determinedly. "I've a notion to chastise you! Talking like that with the whole of life before you! Such cluttered nonsense!"

Still talking he started toward the stairs and Willem's room, and Kathrien sank into a chair; but the doctor changed his mind, turned, and came back to her again.

"Kathrien, I understand you've not a penny to your name," he said gruffly, "unless you marry Frederik. He has inherited you—along with the orchids and the tulips."

He put his arm around her with a gentle, protective movement as he went on:

"Don't let that influence you. If Peter's plans bind you—and you look as if they did—my door's open. Don't let the neighbours' opinions and a few silver spoons," glancing towards the wedding gifts, "stand in the way of your whole future."

Having thus opened his warm Scotch heart and his home to the motherless girl, it was indicative of his character that he should give her no chance to thank him. Before she could speak, he had run up the stairs, placed his cigar on the little table in the upper hall, and hurried into Willem's room.

Outside the sky grew blacker and blacker, darkening the room where Kathrien sat. Suddenly she rose from her chair, and stretching out her arms, gave a cry that was dragged from her very soul.

"Oh! Oom Peter, Oom Peter, why did you do it? *Why* did you do it?"

She looked all at once a woman. No longer the carefree, happy girl she had been but a few short weeks before. Standing thus, her beautiful face full of agony, she did not hear Marta as she came in from the dining-room to carry upstairs the dainty wedding clothes for the morrow—a mass of filmy, fluffy white, laid carefully over both arms.

At first Marta did not see her in the dim yellow gloom of the large room; but a moment later, in alarm, she dropped the clothes in a careful heap on a chair, and ran to Kathrien as fast as her stocky figure and many Dutch petticoats would allow.

"*Och,*" she cried sympathetically. At her pitying touch, Kathrien suddenly buried her face on Marta's broad breast, and broke into convulsive sobs. Marta hushed her as she would a baby, with many sweet, caressing Dutch words.

"Sh! Sh! *Lievling,* Sh! Sh! Old Marta is here! Cry all you want to—— 'Twill do you good! A bride to cry on her wedding eve! Who ever heard such things! You should be happy—the good Mynheer Grimm would wish his child happy on her wedding eve! Sh! You

will have a fine day to-morrow, for it storms to-night—a good sign! You must have a bright face to show your husband, and a face of happiness! Not a swollen little face—like this! What a face to take to a bridegroom! Marta has fixed the dress—'tis wonderful! See there over the chair, so filmy—like a cloud—you will be like a lily in a cloud of dew to-morrow. Think how beautiful! Do not spoil it all, *lievling!* Be happy, Kathrien, Kathrien *wees, bedard, kindje lievling.* Be happy among those who love you so!"

Comforted by Marta's soothing words, and relieved by a good cry, Kathrien wiped her eyes.

"There, there, Marta," she said, drawing a long, quivering breath, "others have troubles too, haven't they?"

Marta nodded her head vigorously.

"*Ach!*" she sighed. "*Gut—Ja!* Others have their troubles!"

Kathrien kissed Marta gently, then said:

"I had hoped, Marta, that Anne Marie would have heard of uncle, and come back to us at this time—you are so brave—you never complain—Poor Marta!"

Once more Marta sighed.

"If it could have brought us all together once

more—but no message—nothing—I cannot understand—my only child."

Nearer and nearer came the storm. The rain pounded on the shingles and pattered loudly against the windows. The wind howled around the eves, and the old house rattled and shook in spite of its solid foundation.

Marta, still brooding over Kathrien like a motherly hen over her chicken, shuddered at the rattling of the window blinds.

From the midst of the general tumult a new sound detached itself—a sharp double rap from the old-fashioned knocker.

"*Och!*" cried Marta. "It must be Pastor and the others! You don't feel much like seeing visitors, my lamb. Run away now before I let 'em in—and bathe your eyes in lavender water."

She hurried to the front door, and Kathrien, at once brought to herself, hastened upstairs to her room.

As Marta opened wide the door, Mr. Batholommey and Colonel Lawton (Peter Grimm's former lawyer) seemed fairly blown into the hall.

"Good-evening, Marta," boomed the clergy-

man's unctuous tones. "The elements are indeed at war to-night! I trust the household is well?"

Marta curtseyed bobbingly to both men as she said:

"Yes, sir, thank you, Mr. Batholommey, only poor little Willem, sir. He's strange and not like himself, sir. The doctor was in and out through the day, and now he's here again—upstairs with Willem."

As Marta talked, Mr. Batholommey divested himself of his long black rainproof coat, and Colonel Lawton (who had not felt it necessary to reply to Marta's civil greeting) hastily took off his rubber poncho, giving it a vigorous shake that sent the raindrops flying. He was a tall, middle-aged man, loosely put together, who wore his clothes very badly. One somehow got the idea that they were never pressed.

"Brr!" he cried, taking off his overshoes. "What a storm for June! It's more like fall! Look at my rubbers—and yours are just as bad—mud-soaked! Get 'em off, quick. They're enough to give any one a chill!"

Marta had slipped out unnoticed, and now Frederik came in just in time to see the dripping coats hung up on the hat rack.

"Good-evening," he said in what he intended for a cordial tone.

"Ah, just in time," answered Colonel Lawton. "Gee Whillikins! What a day!"

Then turning again to Mr. Batholommey he went on jocularly:

"Great weather for baptisms—Parson."

Having successfully disentangled himself at last from all his water-soaked outer coverings, Mr. Batholommey turned and offered a damp and rainy hand to Frederik.

"Good-evening, good-evening, Frederik," he said impressively. "I'm glad to see you. We are pleased to be here, *in spite* of the weather."

"Well, here we are, Frederik, my boy,——" put in Colonel Lawton. "At the time you set."

After shaking hands with both men, Frederik, perhaps unconsciously, wiped his own on his handkerchief. Then going to the desk, he took a paper from under the paperweight. After studying it a moment, he said (smiling a bit to himself and turning that the others might not see the smile):

"I sent for you to hear a memorandum left by my uncle. I came across it only this morning."

Both Mr. Batholommey and Colonel Lawton tried to conceal their excitement.

"I must have drawn up ten wills for the old gentleman," announced Colonel Lawton, "but he always tore 'em up."

Then, throwing back his head and peering at Frederik through his spectacles:

"May I have a drink of his plum brandy, Frederik?"

"Certainly," answered Frederik carelessly. "Help yourself. Pastor, will you have some?"

Colonel Lawton poured out a glass of brandy and offered it to Mr. Batholommey, then helped himself with alacrity. In the roll of thunder which came at that moment, no one heard the footsteps of Mrs. Batholommey, as she entered from the "front parlour."

The tableau that met her vision caused her to give a little shriek as she stopped short, and gazed with horror-struck eyes at her husband and his brandy glass.

"Why, *Henry! What* are you doing? Are your feet wet?"

Mr. Batholommey did not get a drink every day, and this one was much too nearly his to be relinquished now. It was not a case for self-

denial. It was not a case where it was necessary to be a good example for any one. Therefore the pastor gave place to the husband for a moment, and when Mrs. Batholommey repeated:

"Are your feet wet, Henry?"

He answered with decision:

"No, Rose, they're *not*. I want a drink and I'm going to *take* it. It's a bad night."

Mrs. Batholommey said no more, but closing her mouth tightly, turned away with lifted eyebrows and downcast eyes, reproachful indignation bristling at every point.

Her husband, well pleased at his little victory, smacked his lips with enjoyment; returned the now empty glass to the Colonel and, rubbing his hands together, went toward the fireplace. Mrs. Batholommey, her indignation quickly forgotten, joined him there and sat down beside him. Colonel Lawton, hastily replacing decanter and glasses on the table, also drew up a chair in front of the fire—and waited.

CHAPTER XI

THE LEGACIES

FREDERIK, glancing at the backs of the three eager, huddled figures crouching almost literally in the fireplace, smiled again to himself—and allowed them to wait.

Finally, Colonel Lawton could stand it no longer. Still with his back to the heir, and his eyes toward the fire, he cried:

"Well, go ahead, Frederik."

No response. Mr. Batholommey tried next.

"I knew your uncle would remember his friends and his charities," he said smugly. "He gave it in such a free-handed, princely way."

Frederik could not resist a sarcastic chuckle, as he glanced toward the three backs once more, and then began to read the memorandum aloud.

"For Mrs. Batholommey:"

He got no further for, at the first word, the three chairs were turned around to face Frederik, quickly and simultaneously; so that the beneficiaries might not have even their own backs between them and their coming fortune.

At hearing her name, Mrs. Batholommey burst out:

"The dear man! To think he remembered *me!* I knew he'd remember the church and Mr. Batholommey—of course—but to think he'd remember *me!*"

Here she cast her eyes up to heaven in grateful recognition.

"He knew that our income was very limited," she went on comfortably. "He was *so thoughtful.* His purse," she sighed with feeling, "was always open."

Having delivered this eulogism of the dead, the lady folded her hands placidly, and with eyes cast down, but attentive, settled herself to await developments.

Frederik looked at her a moment, grinned to himself, then continued:

"For Mr. Batholommey:"

The clergyman nodded solemnly, but a pleased expression crept about the corners of his mouth and his face took on an extra look of smugness.

"Our reward is laid up for us," he murmured sententiously, "where we least expect it."

"Quite so——" said Frederik shortly. "And as the doctor isn't here—well, the next is you,

Colonel. The others mentioned are people in his employ."

Colonel Lawton settled lower in his chair, until he might almost be said to be lying on his back. He crossed his legs luxuriously and took a cigar from his pocket, saying as he lighted it:

"He knew I did the best I could for him—the *grand old man!*" Then dropping the eulogistic tone for one of strict business:

"What'd he leave me?"

Frederik kept them waiting a moment longer. He was having the time of his life. He had purposely strung out the situation to its last thread, for the joy of witnessing the self-satisfied eagerness of the three legatees. Silent now, but acutely attentive, they sat with watchful eyes trained on Frederik and the all-important paper which he was holding so carelessly in his hand—the paper that was presently to tell them so much of moment. Then it came.

"Mrs. Batholommey, he wishes you to have his miniature—with his affectionate regard."

Frederik took a miniature from the desk drawer and offered it to Mrs. Batholommey with much ceremony. She did not take it, but sat waiting as before, merely folding her hands as she purred:

"Dear old gentleman—and—er—yes?"

Frederik seemed not to hear her, and laying the miniature on the desk, went on reading:

"To Mr. Batholommey——"

The clergyman's wife broke in quickly.

"But—er—you didn't finish *mine!*"

Frederik turned around in his chair and looked directly at her.

"You're finished," he said.

"I'm *finished?*" cried Mrs. Batholommey, in a voice trembling with indignation.

"Rose!" her husband remonstrated in severe rebuke.

"Oh, it's all very well for you to say 'Rose!' How would *you* like it to get nothing but an old picture? Tell me that!"

Here she had recourse to her handkerchief, and her lips trembled as she wiped her eyes, sniffling sorrowfully and all unheeded by the others.

Frederik took a watch fob from the drawer before he continued his reading.

"To Mr. Batholommey: my antique watch fob —with profound respect."

The executor rolled the words under his tongue.

Mr. Batholommey rose, bowed graciously, and accepted the watch fob without looking at it. Then he sat down.

The voice of Fate went on:

"To Colonel Lawton——"

Before Frederik could get any farther, Mrs. Batholommey was again at the front:

"His *watch fob?* Is that what he left *Henry?* Is that all? His—— Why! *Well!* I can't believe it! If he had no wish to make our life easier, at least he should have left something for the church. Oh, Henry!" she cried in consternation. "Won't the congregation have a crow to pick with you!"

Frederik no longer made any effort to conceal his pleasure at the part he had to play. He smiled broadly and maliciously and he was quite willing that they should all see him smile.

It must be said of Mr. Batholommey that he took his disappointment rather well. He said nothing at all, and he tried not to show how he felt. In fact he tried not to *feel* any resentment toward his late parishioner. It was one of the hardest moments of his life; but he knew that as a clergyman he should be able to forgive—and he tried very hard.

It would have been so comfortable to have a tidy sum to put by for his old age! He had expected it so confidently! He had flattered and praised and praised and flattered! And now, after all, he was left high and dry—with a watch fob to look to for comfort in his declining years! He would keep his feelings to himself if possible, however. He did not care to make Frederik's triumph any greater, or his smile any broader on his account; so he compelled himself to listen to the third part of the memorandum with an expression of polite interest.

"To my lifelong friend, Colonel Lawton, I leave my most cherished possession."

The Colonel preened himself. He stuck his thumbs into the armholes of his vest and wagged his crossed foot complacently. This was to be the real kernel of the memorandum.

His appearance of security was too much for Mrs. Batholommey.

"Oh! When the church hears——"

She was interrupted by Colonel Lawton:

"I don't know why he was called upon to leave anything to the church," he said truculently, uncrossing his legs and leaning forward. "He gave it thousands, and only last month he put in chimes.

As I look at it, he wished to give you something he had used—something personal. Perhaps the miniature and the fob *ain't* worth three whoops in hell—it's the *sentiment!*"

He lay back in his chair again as he fairly chewed on the word 'sentiment.' Once more he crossed his legs, and peered at Frederik through his glasses.

"Drive on, Fred," he ordered.

"To Colonel Lawton, my father's prayer book."

As he read, Frederik put one hand into the drawer, and took out a worn prayer book.

Mr. Batholommey smiled, and chuckled behind his hand, but Colonel Lawton seemed dazed. His jaw dropped, and he looked helplessly at Frederik and the others.

"What?" he said in a choking voice. "His prayer book—*me?*"

As in a dream he slowly leaned forward and took it gingerly between two fingers as one might a June bug—gazing at it in amazed horror and incredulity the while.

"Is that all?" demanded Mrs. Batholommey.

"That's all," answered Frederik, bowing to Mrs. Batholommey and smiling radiantly.

Colonel Lawton, still dazed, could only reiterate:

"A prayer book. Me? What for?"

Then he got up slowly.

"Well, I'll be—— Here, Parson." As an idea struck him, he turned quickly toward Mr. Batholommey. "Let's shift—you take the prayer book and I'll take the old fob!"

Mr. Batholommey smiled and waved away the offered book.

"Thank you," he said smoothly, "I already have a prayer book."

At this retort, the Colonel wilted completely. Drawing his chair close to the fire he sat down limply and gave himself up to bitter reflection.

Mrs. Batholommey seemed the least able of the three to bear the shattering of her high hopes. She moved around the room restlessly.

"Well, all I can say is"—(her voice shook and her eyes reproached Frederik)—"I'm disappointed in your uncle."

No one paid any attention to her remark, each person being engrossed in his own thoughts. For some moments the air was pregnant with unspoken invective.

CHAPTER XII

MOSTLY CONCERNING GRATITUDE

FINALLY Colonel Lawton turned toward Frederik. He was now sitting astride his chair and puffing violently at his cigar.

"Is *this* what you hauled us out in the rain for?" he snarled.

Mrs. Batholommey, all unheeding, went on with her own train of thought.

"I see it all now," she whimpered. "He only gave to the church to show off!"

"Rose!" her husband cried, aghast. "I myself am disappointed, but——"

"He did!" interrupted Mrs. Batholommey in tears of wrath. "Oh, why didn't he continue his work? He was not generous. He was a hard, uncharitable, selfish old man."

"Rose, my dear!" remonstrated Mr. Batholommey. "Think what you are saying!"

"He was! If he were here, I'd say it to his face. The congregation sicked *you* after him. And now he's gone and you'll get nothing more. And they'll call you slow—slow and pokey!

You'll see! To-morrow you'll wake up!"

"My dear!" expostulated her husband once more.

But Mrs. Batholommey paid no attention to his words or to the beseeching look that accompanied them. She waved an arm dramatically.

"Here's a man the rector spent half his time with—and for what? A watch fob!"

The ineffable scorn with which she pronounced these last words caused Mr. Batholommey to hang his head.

"You'll see!" she went on. "This will be the end of you! It's not what you preach that counts nowadays. It's what you coax out of the rich parishioners' pockets."

"Mrs. Batholommey!" thundered the clergyman, taking a step forward; but he might as well have tried to stem the ocean.

"The church needs funds to-day. Religion doesn't stand where it did, when a college professor is saying that—that—"—(here her voice broke)—"the Star of Bethlehem was only a comet."

The end of the sentence resolved itself into a veritable wail and she sat down quickly and subsided into her handkerchief.

"My dear!" reiterated the helpless husband.

"Oh!" she wailed through her tears, "if I said all the things I feel like saying about Peter Grimm"—(here it almost sounded as if she ground her teeth)—"well—I shouldn't be a fit clergyman's wife. Not to leave his dear friends a——"

Again her voice was muffled in the folds of the handkerchief, and Colonel Lawton took advantage of the temporary lull to put in a word.

"He wasn't *liberal,*" he said, rising, "but for God's sake, Madam, think what he ought to have done for *me* after my patiently listening to his plans for twenty years! Mind, I'm not complaining, but what have I got out of it? A Bible!"

"Oh, you've feathered *your* nest, Colonel!" cried Mrs. Batholommey, recovering somewhat.

"I never came here," retorted Colonel Lawton spitefully, "that *you* weren't begging!"

"See here, Lawton," the clergyman interrupted truculently, "don't forget who you are speaking to!"

Colonel Lawton waved his hand patronisingly at the clergyman.

"That's all right, Parson. I know who I'm speaking to. We're all in the same boat—one's

as good as another—when we're all up against a thing like this. If anything, you two are worse than I am, for you stand for better things. What would your congregation think of either of you if they could look into your hearts this moment and see 'em as they *really* are?"

"Really are—really are!" cried Mrs. Batholommey. "I'm not ashamed to have any one see my heart as it really is!"

(And Mrs. Batholommey was telling the truth, for she was a good woman at heart, and it was not her fault that she had a human desire for this world's goods for those she loved, for the church, and for herself.)

Here Frederik, who had watched the scene with much amusement at first, came forward through the increasing gloom. He was getting tired of the childish bickering.

"Well, well, well, I'm disgusted," he said, "when I see such heartlessness! He was putty in all your hands."

"Oh, you can defend his memory. *You* got the money!" cried Mrs. Batholommey, with asperity. "He liked flattery and you gave him what he wanted and you gave him plenty of it."

"Why not?" retorted Frederik calmly, getting a cigarette out of his case. "The rest of you were at the same thing—yes?"

He struck a match and lighted his cigarette as he continued in a disagreeable tone:

"And I had the pleasure of watching him hand out the money that belonged to me—to *me,*" he repeated. "My money! What business had he to be generous with my money?"

Still talking, Frederik sat down at the desk.

"If he'd lived much longer, I'd have been a pauper. It's a lucky thing for me he di——"

Frederik had the grace to leave the word unfinished.

Mr. Batholommey broke the slight pause.

"Young man," he said solemnly, "it might have been better if Mr. Grimm had given *all* he had to charity—for he left his money to an ingrate."

The "ingrate" laughed derisively.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" he cried. "You amuse one! You don't know how amusing you are."

No one cared to add further to Frederik's amusement, so they all sat still. The room was now perfectly dark, except for an occasional flash

of heat-lightning from the vanished storm.

Night had crept upon them unheeded, so intent had they been on their petty wrangling.

Finally Mrs. Batholommey got up and went towards the desk.

"Where is the miniature?" she demanded. "I don't want it—but I'll take it."

Frederik lighted a match, and by its flickering blaze found the discarded miniature lying face downward on the desk. Mrs. Batholommey snatched it from his fingers, and made her way back to the fireplace.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughed Frederik again.

"Rose, my dear," began Mr. Batholommey, "the min——"

"Sh!" interrupted Frederik.

There was a pause. Then he rose.

"Who came into the room?" he asked in a strange voice.

He lit a match and waved it slowly in the direction of the hall door. It was extinguished instantly as if the wind had blown it out. He lighted another, saying:

"We're sitting in the darkness like owls. Who came in?" he demanded again.

There was no answer as he peered around the

room, holding the match toward first one corner and then another.

"I didn't hear any one," said the Colonel.

"Nor I," added Mrs. Batholommey.

"No," said Mr. Batholommey.

"I was *sure* some one came in," Frederik said in a strange voice.

"You must have imagined it," suggested Mr. Batholommey. "Our nerves are all upset."

"I'll get a light," Frederik said, starting toward the dining-room.

At that moment, Marta entered with the welcome lamps. She carried two of them, one already lighted, which she put upon the table. The other Frederik took quickly from her and carried to the chain-bracket over the desk. This he adjusted with Marta's help, and then lighted.

After which he glanced apprehensively about the room once more. Even under the reassuring flood of light his impression that some one had stolen in upon the dim-lit conference would not wholly vanish.

CHAPTER XIII

THE RETURN

THE Dead Man came home.

The old collie, lying stretched in the deep porch, safe from the storm, knew him. As the Dead Man came up the walk between the trim beds of rain-soaked flowers, the old dog crawled rheumatically to its feet, the bleared eyes brightening, the feathered tail awag in joyous greeting to the loved master who had been so long and so unaccountably absent.

Peter Grimm laid a hand caressingly on his old pet's head; then passed into his former home.

And so, at Frederik's frightened demand, "Who came into the room?" the Dead Man stood among his own again. Before him was the nephew he had loved. Nearby were the husband and wife whose follies and harmless affectations he had forgiven with a laugh of amusement, for the sake of their goodness and for the devotion they bore himself. Lounging in the chair that had been his own was the lawyer who had been his dear friend and adviser. The friends

he had cared for, the nephew on whom his every hope had been set.

With a wistful half-smile, Peter Grimm surveyed the group.

And, as Marta brought in one lighted lamp and then bustled about lighting another, he stood in clear view of them all. Clad in the same old-fashioned garb with which they were so familiar, he was unchanged, save that all age and all care lines were wiped from his face.

He was not a wraith, no grisly spectre, no half-nebulous Shape. He was Peter Grimm, rugged, homespun, the man whose iron individuality had undergone and could undergo no change.

He stood there in the lamplight, plainly visible —to such as had eyes to see him.

The dog, with that sense which God gives to all animals and withholds from all humans, had had no more difficulty in recognising him than when Peter Grimm had walked the earth in the flesh.

The faculty which makes a sleeping dog awake, raise its head, wag its tail and follow with its eyes the movements of some invisible form that moves from place to place in a room,—which makes a flock of chickens scatter squawking and

fluttering when no human being can discern cause for their flight—which makes a horse shy violently when travelling a patch of road, apparently barren of anything to alarm him,—which makes a cat suddenly arch its back and spit and strike at the Unseen, or else rub purringly against an invisible hand—this faculty made Peter Grimm very real to his blear-eyed, asthmatic old collie.

But the inmates of the room, being but human, had seen and heard nothing. Frederik, it is true, being in a constant state of nervous tension that rendered his senses less dense and earthy than usual, had fancied he heard—or felt—some one enter the room. But at the disclaimers of the rest, the notion vanished as such notions do. And the warm flood of lamplight dispelled whatever of the psychic may have brooded over the little group, bringing back their comfortable materialism with a rush.

Wherefore, in his old home and among his own, Peter Grimm stood unseen; that deprecatory half-smile on his square, ageless face.

The lighting of the lamps and Marta's noisy return to her own culinary domain served as signals to break up the group about the desk. Mr. Batholommey crossed the room and took his hat

and coat from the rack, passing within a hand's-breadth of the smiling, expectant Peter Grimm as he did so.

"Well, Frederik," said the rector doubtfully by way of farewell, "I hope that you'll follow your uncle's example at least as far as our parish poor are concerned,—and keep on with *some* of his charities."

Mrs. Batholommey, dutifully following her husband to the rack and helping him on with his coat, turned to hear Frederik answer the question she and the rector had so often and so anxiously discussed during the past ten days. The heir did his best to settle their every doubt in the fewest possible words.

"I may as well tell you now, as any time," said he, "that you needn't look to me for any charitable graft at all. Your parish poor will have to begin hustling for a living now. I don't intend to waste good money in feeding what you Americans call 'a bunch of panhandlers.'"

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Batholommey, inexpressibly disappointed.

The smile died on Peter Grimm's face and the light of happy expectancy was gone from his eyes.

"I am very sorry, Frederik," said the rector

stiffly, "not only that you can speak so of God's poor, but that you are not willing to continue your uncle's splendid philanthropies. It—it doesn't seem possible that he never told you how dear his charities were to him. Well," he broke off with a shrug, and glancing at his watch, "I've got thirty minutes to make a call before tea time."

"I must be toddling, too," said Colonel Lawton. "Are you going my way, Mr. Batholommey? It's queer, Frederik," he added, bidding his host good-bye, "it's queer—deucedly queer how things turn out. There's one thing certain: the old gentleman should have made a will. But it's too late now for us to grumble about that. By the way, what are you going to do with all his relics and family heirlooms, Frederik? Have you thought of it? I supposed, of course, you'd keep everything just as he left it. But from the way you've talked this afternoon, I wonder——"

"Heirlooms? Relics?" queried Frederik, puzzled. "Oh—you mean all this junk?" with a comprehensive hand wave that included Dutch clock, Dutch warming pans, Dutch bric-à-brac, and Dutch furniture. "This junk all over the house? Oh, I'll have it carted to the nearest ash heap.

It isn't worth a red cent of any one's money."

Peter Grimm strode forward, his lips parted in quick protest. But Colonel Lawton was already answering, with an appraising look about the room:

"I don't know about that, Frederik. It may not be as worthless as you seem to think. Better let me send for a dealer to sort it over after you've gone on your honeymoon. I've heard that some people are fools enough to pay a lot of good money for this sort of antique trash."

"Not a bad idea," approved Frederik. "See what you can do about it, won't you? I want it cleared out. And if I can get rid of it and do it at a profit, too, why, all the better."

"If I could get that old clock," put in Mrs. Batholommey, the light of the bargain hunt shining in her large face, "I might consent to take it off your hands. Of course it isn't really worth anything. But——"

"I've an idea," replied Frederik, with charming dearth of civility, "that it's worth a lot more than you'd pay me for it."

"I hope," she snapped angrily as she glared at Frederik, "that your poor dear uncle is where he can see his mistake now!"

"I am where I can see several," said the Dead Man to ears that could not hear.

"Do you know," pursued Mrs. Batholommey, whose depths of professional sweetness had been turned faintly sub-acid by the events of the day—"do you know, Frederik, what I would like to say to your uncle if I could just once stand face to face with him, this very minute?"

"Yes," smiled Peter Grimm sadly, as he looked deep into her eyes, "I know."

"I should say to him——" began Mrs. Batholommey.

Then she checked herself as at some impulse she herself did not understand, and finished somewhat lamely:

"No, I wouldn't say it, either. He's dead. And we're told we must speak no ill of the dead. Though, for my part, I never could see what right we gain to immunity just by dying. And—oh, by the way, Henry," she broke off as her husband and the lawyer passed out of the vestibule, "Kathrien expects you back for supper. Don't forget, will you, dear? Good-night, Colonel Lawton."

She followed them, closed the front door behind them, and bustled off to look after the arrangements for supper.

Frederik yawned, lighted a cigarette, and sauntered out into the office, Peter Grimm watching him with infinitely sad reproach in his luminous eyes.

Then, left alone in the room he had loved, the Dead Man looked about him at the dear old bits of furniture and ornaments that had meant so much to him and whose fate he had just heard weighed between auctioneer's hammer and rubbish heap.

He moved across to the rack, as if by lifelong instinct, and hung his antique hat on its accustomed peg. The simple, everyday action brought him so vividly close to older days that, as Marta pottered in with another newly filled lamp, he accosted her.

"Marta!" he called, as she gave no sign of recognition to his kindly nod and smile.

She set down the lamp in its place on the piano, crossed to the pulley-weight clock, and noisily wound it. As the old woman started back toward her kitchen, the Dead Man put himself once more in her way.

"Marta!" said he, then more loudly and peremptorily, *"Marta!"*

She passed within an inch of his outstretched

hand and entered the kitchen, shutting the door behind her. Peter Grimm stared blankly after his housekeeper.

"I seem to be a stranger in my own house," he murmured. "My friends pass me by. Their gross eyes cannot see me. Their gross ears will not hear me. But—Lad knew me. He came to meet me, wagging his tail just as he used to. I—I remember I've more than once noticed his going to meet other people like that. People *I* couldn't see in those days."

Frederik lounged back from the office, cigarette in mouth. He took out his watch, compared it with the clock on the wall, slipped it back into his pocket, and was crossing to the outer door when the telephone bell on the desk jangled.

Frederik laid down his cigarette, seated himself at the desk, and picked up the receiver.

"Hello!" he called.

At the reply, he glanced around hastily, to make sure he was not likely to be overheard. Then, sinking his voice almost to a whisper and speaking with a nervous, almost guilty eagerness, he answered:

"Yes. Yes. This is Mr. Grimm. Mr. Frederik Grimm. I've been waiting all day to hear

from you, Mr. Hicks. How are you? Wait one moment, please."

He rose, crossed the room, closed the door into the dining-room,—the only door that had been open,—glanced up into the bedroom gallery to make certain it was empty, then hurried back to the telephone.

"Yes," said he. "Go ahead."

There was a brief pause while he listened. Then he replied, in a tone of laboured indifference:

"Oh, no. You're quite mistaken. I am not 'eager to sell.' Not at all. As a matter of fact," he continued unctuously, "I much prefer to carry out my dear uncle's wishes and keep the business in the family. You must surely remember how determined he was that it should be kept on.—What?—'If I could get my price,' eh? That's different, of course. It puts a new aspect on the whole affair.—What? Oh, well, an offer such as that deserves careful thought. I could not decline it offhand.—No, I admit it is very tempting.—'Talk it over?' Certainly."

He paused, then went on in answer to a query from the other end of the wire:

"To-morrow? No, I'm afraid not. You

see, I'm going to be married to-morrow. A man does not want to be bothered with business deals on his wedding day.—No, the next day won't do, either, I'm afraid. You see, we are sailing directly for Europe. Thank you. Yes, I deserve all the congratulations you can offer me.—What?—Very well. This evening, then. That will suit me perfectly. You're in New York, I suppose? What time will it be convenient to you to get to Grimm Manor?—What?—Yes, that's all right. No. Not here at the house. I'll meet you at the hotel. The tavern.—Yes, I'll be there promptly.—What?"

He listened a moment, then laughed in evident, if subdued, amusement.

"So the dear old gentleman used to tell you his plans never failed, did he?" he questioned. "Yes, I've heard the same boast from him hundreds of times. That's one reason why I want the deal kept quiet till it's settled. So I asked you to meet me at the tavern instead of here at the house. I don't want it thought by other people that I'd run counter to his plans in any way. God rest his soul! Hey? 'What would he say if he knew?' I hate to think. He could express himself very forcibly when his dear, stubborn old

will was crossed. You may remember that. Oh, well, it's *life*. Everything must change."

There was a roll of thunder. At the same instant the windows flared pink-white with lightning. A flash of electricity ran purring and crackling along the telephone itself.

Frederik, with a sharp cry of surprise, dropped the instrument, and squeezed his electrically shocked arm. Then gingerly he picked up the telephone, replaced the receiver, and turned away toward the window seat.

Peter Grimm stood eyeing the telephone as if the man who had so lately been at the other end of the wire were directly in front of him.

"You don't know it, Hicks," said the Dead Man quietly, "but you will never carry this plan of yours through. We are going to meet very soon, you and I."

As if in response to his strange prophecy, the telephone jangled once more. Frederik returned to the desk and put the receiver to his ear.

"Hello!" he called. "Oh, it's you, Mr. Hicks? No, they didn't cut us off. I thought you were through.—What?—A little louder, please. I can't hear you very well.—What?—You're feeling ill? Oh, I'm sorry.—What?—

Oh, yes, it will do just as well to send your lawyer instead, if you find you're too sick to make the journey. Your lawyer will be empowered to attend to everything in your name, I suppose?—Good.—Then we can close the deal to-night. At the hotel and at the same time. All right. What did you say his name was?—Shelp?—All right. Good-bye. I hope you'll feel much better in the morning, Mr. Hicks."

He relighted his cigarette, humming a little tune under his breath as he walked from the desk. His narrow face was very content.

"And that's the boy I loved and trusted!" said Peter Grimm, half aloud, watching Frederik take his hat and umbrella from the rack and leave the house. "I wonder if I am to unearth many more of my mistakes. I come upon a new one at every turn."

His wandering gaze rested on the door of Kathrien's room, in the gallery above. His lips parted in the old whimsical smile. Lifting his voice, he gave the odd call that had for years been a signal to Kathrien of his presence in the house and his desire to see her.

"*Ou-oo!*" rang out the familiar cry.

And, before its echoes could die away, Kathrien

was out of her room and at the stairhead. She stood there an instant, dazed, wondering, like some one half-awakened from heavy sleep.

Looking down into the room below, she slowly descended the stairs.

"I thought some one called me," she said.

And though she spoke the words in her own brain and not from the lips, Peter Grimm heard and answered her.

"You did," said he. "I called you."

Filled with a sense that she was not alone, yet seeing and hearing no one, she came down into the seemingly vacant room. And, still without words, she said:

"I thought I heard a voice like—like——"

"Yes," answered the Dead Man again, "you wanted me, little girl. That's why I have come. There, there!" he soothed, as she stood with troubled face trying to formulate and understand the strange sensation that had suddenly taken possession of her. "Don't worry, Katje. It'll come out all right. We'll arrange things very differently. I've come back to——"

She moved away, unhearing. She passed unseeing from the loving outstretched arms.

"Katje!" he called tenderly.

But she did not turn at the loving appeal in his soundless voice.

"Oh, Katje! Katje!" he pleaded, following her. "Can't I make my presence known to you? Oh, *don't* cry!"

For the tears had welled up, unbidden, in her eyes.

And this time his words, in a vague, roundabout way, seemed to reach her understanding.

"Oh, well," she sighed, drying her eyes. "Crying doesn't help."

"Ah!" exclaimed Peter Grimm eagerly. "Good! *Good!* She hears me! Smile, little girl! *Smile,* I say."

A trembling ghost of a smile played about her sad lips.

"That's right!" he encouraged. "Smile! *Smile!* You haven't smiled before since I—since I found there was a place a million times happier and lovelier and more wonderful than this world that I left. Listen, little girl! Listen, Katje, and try to understand me. *There are no dead.* We never *really* die. We couldn't if we tried to. See the gardens out there. Look!"

As if in response to his words, Kathrien's half-smiling face was turned toward the flowering gar-

den beds that stretched away on every hand, just outside the window.

"See the gardens," he went on, glad at his own seeming success in catching and holding her attention. "They die. But they come back all the better for it. All the fresher and younger and more beautiful. What people call death is nothing more than a nap. We wake from it freshened—rested—made over again. It's a wonderful sleep that people fall into, old and slow and tired out. And they spring up from it like happy children tumbling out of bed,—ready to frolic through another world. It is as foolish and wrong to mourn for people who fall into that dear sleep as to mourn for the children when they close their eyes at the end of the day. *There is no death.* There are no dead. It is all rest and wonder and beauty and perfect bliss. So stop being sad for me, my own little girl!

"There!" he cried in triumph, as the smile deepened on her pale face. "You're happier already! And you begin to understand me. You can hear what I am saying. Because no sin, no grossness has ever shut your ears to all but earthly sounds. Now listen to me carefully: Katje, I want you to break that silly, wicked promise I wheedled

you into making. I want you to break it. You mustn't ruin your life—and James's—by marrying Frederik. It would mean misery for every one. Most of all for *you,* little girl. That's why I came here. To undo the harm that my blindness and obstinacy brought about. When that is settled I can take my journey back in peace. I can't go until you break that promise. And—and oh, I *long* to go, Katje! *Katje!"* his voice rising in yearning entreaty, as the smile faded from her face and her big eyes once more filled. "Isn't my message *any* clearer to you?"

"Oh," sighed Kathrien, half aloud. "I'm so alone—so *alone!"*

"Alone?" he echoed. "You are not alone, Katje. I'm here. Can't you feel my presence? And then there's your mother. The mother you were too little to remember. I have met her, Katje. I have met your mother. She knew me at once. After all those years. 'You are Peter Grimm!' she said. I told her you had a happy home here. And she said she knew that. Then I told her about the future I had arranged, and the plans I'd made for you and Frederik. And she said: 'Peter Grimm, you have overlooked the most important thing in the world:—*Love!* Give

her the right to the choice of her lover. It *is* her right.' Then it came over me all at once that I had made a terrible mistake. That I had been presumptuous and had tried to play Providence and shape the future of another. At that moment, Katje, you called to me. And I came back to show you the way."

He moved nearer to her.

"Your mother," he whispered, bending over the girl as she sank into a chair by the fire, her eyes dreaming and full of a new joy, "your mother told me to lay my hand on your dear head and give you her blessing. And she said I must tell you she will be with you,—close—*close* to you—in heart and thought, until the day shall come when she can hold you in her arms. You and your loved husband."

Kathrien's dreamy gaze strayed from the fire-flicker on the hearth to the office door, on whose farther side she knew Hartmann was at work.

"Yes," smiled Peter Grimm, noting her glance. "You and James. And the message ended in this kiss."

He touched his lips to her forehead. And, at the unfelt contact, the light again sprang into her eyes.

"Can't you see I'm trying to help you, Katje?" he begged. "Can't you even hope? Come, come! *Hope!* Why, anybody can hope. It is the very easiest and most natural thing on earth. Especially when one is young—as you and I are. What *is* Youth but perpetual Hope?"

The light in her eyes deepened. Her look strayed again to the closed office door. She rose and took a step toward it, then turned, passed her hand caressingly over the flowers on the desk, and moved over to the piano.

She seated herself on the music stool and, for the first time in ten endless days, let her fingers stray over the keys. In a hushed little voice she began to sing:

> "The bird so free in the heavens
> Is but the slave of the nest.
> For all things must toil as God wills it,
> Must laugh and toil and rest.
> The rose must bloom in the garden,
> The bee must gather its store.
> The cat must watch the mousehole,
> And the dog must guard the door."

"Oh!" she broke off in sudden self-reproach. "How *can* I sit here singing,—at a time like this!"

"Sing!" urged the Dead Man. "Why not? Why not at a time like this as well as at any other

time? Is it because you are afraid you are not being sad enough at losing me? You *haven't* lost me. Nothing is ever lost. The old uncle you loved doesn't sleep out in the churchyard dust. That is only a dream. He is *here*—alive! More alive than ever he was. A thousandfold more alive. All his age and weaknesses and faults are gone. Youth is glowing in his heart. He is bathed in it. It radiates from him. Eternal Youth that no one still on earth can know. Oh, little girl of mine, if only I could tell you what is ahead of you! It's the wonderful secret of the Universe. And you *won't* hear me? You won't understand?"

Still smiling, but without turning toward the loving, eager Spirit close beside her, Kathrien was looking out into the fragrant June dusk. Peter Grimm shrugged his shoulders.

"I must try some other way of making you hear," said he.

He looked up at the closed door of Willem's sick room for a moment, then nodded.

"Here comes some one," he announced, with the old whimsical twist of his lips, "who will know all about it. The secrets of the other world are as plain as day to him. He has told me so himself."

CHAPTER XIV

"I CAN'T GET IT ACROSS"

THE door of Willem's room opened, and Dr. McPherson came out on the landing. He moved slowly, hesitatingly, as though impelled by some force outside his logical comprehension.

Still walking as if drawn forward half against his will, the doctor descended the stairs to the big living-room. At the stair-foot stood Peter Grimm, with outstretched hands to receive him.

"Well, Andrew," said the Dead Man, in the tone of banter that had never in life failed to "get a rise" out of his medical crony, "I apologise. You were right. I was mistaken. I didn't know what I was talking about. So I've come back, as I promised, to keep our compact and to apologise. You see, I——"

"Well, Doctor," asked Kathrien, looking back into the room at sound of McPherson's steps, "how is Willem?"

"Better," answered McPherson. "He's dropped off to sleep again. I'm still a bit puzzled about his case. It's——"

"Andrew! *Andrew!*" interrupted the Dead Man, almost fiercely. "I've got a message to deliver, but I can't get it across. This sort of thing is your own beloved specialty. Now's your chance. The chance you've always been longing for. Tell her I don't want her to marry Frederik! Tell her I——"

"A puzzling condition," continued McPherson, unhearing. "I can't quite grasp the meaning——"

"What meaning?" demanded Peter Grimm. "Mine? Try again. Tell her I don't want her to——"

"But," went on McPherson, drawing out pad and fountain pen, "I'll leave this prescription for one of the gardeners to take over to the druggist's. I'll leave it as I go out. I'll be back in—Why, what's up, Kathrien? What has happened? Oh, you've thought it over, eh? That's good. That's the way it should be. I left you all tears and now I find you all smiles. It——"

"Yes," answered Kathrien, half ashamed at her own oddly changed spirits. "I am happier for some reason. Much, *much* happier than I've been for days and days. I've—I've had such a strange feeling this past few minutes!"

"Have, eh?" asked McPherson curiously. "H'm! So have I. It's in the air, I suppose. I've been as restless as a hungry mouse. Something, for instance, seemed to draw me downstairs here. I can't explain it."

"I can," exulted Peter Grimm. "I'm beginning to be felt!"

"Doctor," hesitated Kathrien, looking nervously about her into the dimmer corners of the lamplit room, "just a little while ago, I—I thought I heard Oom Peter call me.—I was upstairs in my room. And it seemed to me I could hear that dear old call he used to give. It was so vivid, so distinct, so real! It was my imagination, of course. I'm so used to hearing Oom Peter's voice in this room that sometimes I forget for a moment that he isn't here. But—but some one *must* have called me. I couldn't have imagined it *all*. Isn't it strange to hear a call like that and then look around and find no one is there?"

"It is a phenomenon well recognised in modern science," affirmed McPherson. "I could cite you a hundred instances of it. Not all from imaginative persons either, Kathrien!" he added solemnly. "I have the firm conviction that in a very short time I shall hear from Peter!"

"I hope so," sighed the Dead Man in whimsical despair.

"He made the compact I told you about," continued McPherson, "and Peter Grimm never broke his word. He will come back. Be sure of that. But what I want is some positive proof,—some absolute test to prove his presence when he comes. Poor old Peter! Bless his kind, obstinate heart! If he keeps that compact with me and comes back, do you know what I shall ask him first?"

"You poor, blind, deaf, old Scotchman!" laughed Peter Grimm. "Open your eyes and your ears! You are like the man who lay down at the edge of the river and died of thirst."

"What would you ask him first, Doctor?" queried the girl as McPherson paused with dramatic effect, awaiting the question.

"First of all," said the doctor, "I shall ask him: 'Peter, in the next world does our work go on just where we left it off here?'"

"Well," returned Peter Grimm thoughtfully, "that question is rather a poser, isn't it?"

"It is a difficult question to answer, I admit," mused McPherson, following what he deemed to

be the trend of his own thoughts. "I realise that."

"You heard me?" cried the Dead Man, with sudden excitement. "You *heard?* Come! We're getting results at last, you and I!"

"Results," murmured the doctor abstractedly, "are—— What was I saying? Oh, yes. In the life-to-come, for instance, am I to be a bone-setter and is he to keep on being a tulip man?"

"It stands to reason, Andrew, doesn't it?" suggested Peter Grimm. "What chance would a beginner have with a fellow who knew his business before he was born? Hey?"

With the merrily victorious air that he had ever assumed when he had scored a telling point in their old-time discussions, Peter surveyed the doctor.

"I believe, Katje," mused McPherson after a moment's consideration, "that it is possible to have more than one chance at our life work. It never occurred to me before, but——"

"There!" exclaimed the Dead Man. "You caught *that!* Now, why can't you get that message about Kathrien's marriage? Try, man! Try!"

"Kathrien," said McPherson, suddenly shifting

from conjecture to everyday conditions, "have you thought over what I said to you about this marriage with Frederik?"

"He *did* get it!" muttered Peter Grimm.

"Yes," rejoined Kathrien, "I have thought it over, Doctor. And I thank you with all my heart. But——"

"Well?"

"I shall go on with it. I shall be married, just as Oom Peter wished me to. I shan't go back on my promise."

McPherson growled in futile disgust.

"Don't give up, Andrew!" exhorted Peter Grimm. "Don't give up! *Make* her see it your way. A girl can always change her mind. Try again. *Andrew!*"

The last word was almost a cry. For McPherson, with a shrug of his shoulders, accepted defeat in surly silence and was tramping across to the hat rack, where he began to gather up his outdoor raiment.

"Oh, Andrew! *Andrew!*" he pleaded, following him up. "Don't throw away the fight so easily! Tell her to——"

"Good-bye, Kathrien," said the doctor at the threshold. "If you choose to make toad-pie of

your life, it's no business of mine. I'll drop in later for a good-night look at Willem."

"Good-night, Doctor," answered Kathrien, "and—thank you again."

With a wordless grunt, McPherson went out, leaving Peter Grimm staring hopelessly after him.

"I see I can't depend on *you,* Andrew," murmured the Dead Man, "in spite of your psychic lore and your belief in my return. Why is it they can all understand—or *half* understand—the unimportant things I say, and yet be deaf to my message? It is like picking out the simple words in a foreign book and then not know what the story is about. Marta—Kathrien—McPherson—they all fail me. I must find some other way."

He turned slowly toward the door of the office. The door almost immediately opened and James Hartmann came into the room. The young man had a pen behind his ear and a half-written memorandum of sales in his hand. He had evidently risen from his work and entered the living-room on an unplanned impulse.

Kathrien had seated herself in a chair by the fire and was gazing drearily into the red embers.

"Look at her, lad!" breathed Peter Grimm.

"She is so pretty—so young—so lonely! Look! There are kisses tangled in that gold hair of hers where it curls about her forehead and neck. Hundreds of them. And her lips are made for kisses. See how dainty and sweet and heart-broken she is. She is dreaming of *you,* James. Are you going to let her go? Why, who could resist such a girl? *You're not going to let her go!* You feel what I am saying to you. You won't give her up. She loves you, boy. And you realise now that you can't live without her. Speak! Speak to her!"

"Miss Kathrien!" said Hartmann earnestly; then halted, frightened at his own temerity.

The girl looked up quickly. At sight of him she flushed and rose impulsively to face him.

"Oh, James!" she cried. "I'm so glad—so *glad* to see you!"

As their hands met the man's hesitancy fled.

"I *felt* that you were in here," said he. "All at once I seemed to know you were here and alone. And before I realised what I was doing, I came in. I didn't mean to."

"Didn't mean to come and see me while you were here?" she echoed in reproach. "Why not?"

"For the same reason I didn't stay when I was here before. I——"

"Why did you go away that time?" she demanded. "Why did you go without a word of good-bye to—to any of us?"

"Tell her, boy," adjured Peter Grimm. "Don't mind *my* feelings."

"Your uncle sent me away," blurted Hartmann, "but it was partly at my own request."

"Oom Peter sent you away? Why?"

"I told him the truth again."

"Oh! One of your usual hot arguments that used to worry me so? I remember how excited you both used to get. Was it about the superiority of potatoes to orchids this time?"

"No. The superiority of one person to the whole world."

But she did not catch his meaning. She was looking up at the big athletic body and the clean, strong face, with an absurd longing to creep into the man's arms for shelter as might a tired child.

"It's so *good* to see you back," she said.

"I'm only here for a few hours," he answered. "Just long enough to put one or two details of the business to rights. Then I'm going away again—this time for good."

"No! Where are you going?"

"Father and I are going to try our luck on our own account. I've a few thousands from a legacy that came to me last month from my grandmother. And father has saved a tidy little sum, too. We're going to start in with small fruits and market gardening. We haven't decided just where."

"It will be so strange—so different—so lonely and *empty* when I come back," she mourned, "with Uncle and you both gone. It seems as if the blessed old home was all broken up. It can never be the same again. I don't know how I can muster courage to come into this house after——"

"It will be easier after the first wrench. Everything is easier than we think it's going to be. And, Kathrien," he went on, steadying his voice by a supreme effort, "I hope you'll be happy—beautifully happy."

Neither of them realised that her hand had somehow slipped into his and was resting very contentedly in the big, firm grasp.

"Whether I'm happy or not," replied Kathrien miserably, "it's the only thing to do. Please try to believe that. Oh, James, he died smiling at me—thinking of me—loving me. And just be-

fore he went he had begged me to marry Frederik. I shall never forget the wonderful look of happiness in his eyes when I promised. It was all he wanted in life. He said he'd never been so happy before. He smiled up at me for the very last time, with his dear face all alight. And there he sat, smiling, after he was gone. The smile of a man leaving this life absolutely satisfied—at peace!"

"I know. Marta told me. I——"

"It's like a hand on my heart, hurting it almost unbearably when I question doing anything he wanted. It has always been so with me ever since I was a baby. I never could bear to go against his wishes. And now that he's gone—why, I *must* keep my word. I couldn't meet him in the Hereafter if I didn't keep that last sacred promise to him. I couldn't say my prayers at night. I couldn't speak his name in them. Oom Peter trusted me. He depended on me. He did everything for me. I must do this for him."

"No, no!" exclaimed the Dead Man. "You are wrong. Tell her so, James!"

"I wanted you to know this, James," finished Kathrien, "because—because——"

A gush of tears blotted out Hartmann's tense,

wretched face and choked her hesitating utterance.

"Have you told Frederik that you don't love him?" asked Hartmann, forcing himself to resist the yearning to gather her into his arms and kiss away her tears. "Does he know?"

She nodded, her face buried in her hands.

"And Frederik is willing to take you like that? On those terms?"

Another dumb nod of the pretty, fluffy little head, with its face still convulsed and hidden.

"The yellow dog!" burst forth Hartmann.

"You flatter him," sadly assented Peter Grimm.

"Look here, Kathrien," hurried on Hartmann, "I didn't mean to say a word of this to-day,—or ever. Not a word. But the instant I came in here from the office just now, something made me change my mind. I knew all at once I *must* talk to you. You looked so little, so young, so helpless, all huddled up there by the fire. Kathrien, you've never had to think for yourself. You don't know what you are doing in going on with this blasphemous, loveless marriage. Why, dear, you are making the most terrible mistake possible to a woman. Marriage *with* love is often a tragedy. Without love it is a hell. A horror that will deepen and grow more dreadful with every year."

"Do you suppose I don't understand that?" she whispered. "Don't make it harder for me."

"Your uncle was wrong to ask such a sacrifice. Why should you wreck your life to carry out his pig-headed plans?"

"Oh!"

"Not strong enough yet," advised Peter Grimm. "Go on, lad."

"You are going to be wretched for the rest of your days, just to please a dead man who can't even know about it," insisted Hartmann. "Or if he *does* know, you may be certain he sees the affair more sanely by this time and is bitterly sorry he made you promise."

"He assuredly is," acquiesced Peter Grimm. "I wish I'd known in other days that you had so much sense. Go ahead!"

"You mustn't speak so, James," reproved Kathrien, deeply shocked. "I——"

"Yes, he must," contradicted the Dead Man. "Go on, James. Stronger!"

"But I *must* speak so!" declared Hartmann, swept on by a power he could not understand. "I'll speak my mind. I don't care how fond you were of your uncle or how much he did for you. It was not right for him to ask this sacrifice of

you. The whole thing was the blunder of an obstinate old man!"

"No! You mustn't!"

"I loved him, too," said Hartmann. "As much in my own way, perhaps, as you did. Though he and I never agreed on any subject under the sun. But, in spite of all my affection for him, I know and always knew he *was* an obstinate old man. Obstinate as a mule. It was the Dutch in him, I suppose."

Peter Grimm nodded emphatic approval.

"Do you know why I was sent away?" rushed on Hartmann, still upheld and goaded along by that incomprehensible impulse. "Do you know why I quarrelled with your uncle?"

"No."

"Because I told him I loved you. He asked me. I didn't tell him because I had any hopes. I hadn't. I haven't now. Oh, girl, I don't know why I'm talking to you like this. I love you. And my arms are aching for you."

He stepped toward her, arms out as he spoke. She retreated, frightened, to where Peter Grimm stood surveying the lover with keen approbation.

"No, no!" she warned. "You mustn't, James. It isn't right—don't."

Her next backward step brought her close to Peter Grimm. And the Dead Man, with a swift motion of his hand, waved her forward into her lover's outstretched arms.

Through no conscious volition of her own, Kathrien sped straight onward, unswerving, unfaltering into the strong circle of those arms for whose warm refuge she had so guiltily felt herself longing.

"No!" she panted, in dutiful resistance.

But the negation was lost against Hartmann's broad breast as he pressed her closely to him.

"I love you!" he repeated over and over in a daze of rapture.

Then in awed wonder:

"And you love *me,* Kathrien!"

"No, no—don't make me say it, dear heart!"

"I *shall* make you say it. It is true. You do love me!"

"What matter if I do?" wailed the girl. "It wouldn't change matters."

"Kathrien!"

"Please don't say anything more. I can't bear it."

Gently, reluctantly, she sought to release herself

from that wonderful embrace. But Hartmann now needed no Spirit Guest to urge him to hold his own.

"I'm not going to let you go," he cried, kissing her white, upturned face till the red glowed back into it. "I won't give you up, Kathrien. I *won't* give you up!"

"You must," she insisted, struggling more fiercely against herself than against him. "You must, dear. I can't break my promise to Oom Peter. I——"

The front door opened. The lovers sprang apart. Frederik entered, glancing quickly from one to the other of them.

"Oh!" he observed. "You in here, Hartmann? I thought I'd find you in the office. I've some unopened mail of my uncle's to glance over. Then I'll join you there."

Hartmann took the broad hint, nodded, and left the room. Frederik's eyes followed him steadily until the door closed behind the young intruder. Then he turned to where Kathrien crouched, panting, bewildered, trembling. Frederik abruptly went over to her, and, before she could guess his purpose, kissed her full on the lips.

Involuntarily the girl recoiled as from some loathly thing.

"Don't!" she exclaimed, fighting for her shaken self-control. "Please don't!"

"Why not?" he snapped.

She did not answer.

"Has Hartmann been talking to you?"

She moved toward the stairfoot.

"Just a moment, please," Frederik interposed, hurrying forward to catch up with her before she could gain the safety of the stairway.

"Hartmann *has* been talking to you. What has he been saying?"

He had seized her hand as she made to mount the stairway. As she did not reply to his question, he repeated it, adding:

"Do you really imagine, Kathrien, that you care for that—fellow?"

"I'd rather not talk about it, please, Frederik," she pleaded.

"No? But it is necessary. Do you——"

She broke away from his suddenly rough grip and fled up the stairway to her own room. As the door shut behind her, Frederik, with clouded face and working lips, strode over to the desk. He passed close by Peter Grimm. But the Dead

Man was still staring blankly after Kathrien.

"Oh, Katje," he muttered, "even Love could not get my message to you! Less influence would be needed to change the fate of a nation than the mind of one good woman. I think a good woman —a *good* woman,—is more stubborn than anything else in the Universe. Not excepting myself. When she has made up her mind to do *right*,—which invariably means to sacrifice herself and thereby make as many other people wretched as possible—not even a Spirit from the Other World can influence her."

With a despairing shrug of the shoulders he turned toward his nephew, and his face hardened. Frederik had seated himself at the desk. He had drawn out the little handful of personal letters that had arrived that afternoon for Peter Grimm and those that Mrs. Batholommey had put into the drawer for safe keeping.

One letter after another Frederik cut open, glanced over, and either put back into the drawer or laid under a paperweight on the desk. Peter Grimm crossed to the opposite side of the desk and stood looking down at him with set face and sad, reproving gaze.

"Frederik Grimm," said the Dead Man at

last, his voice low but infinitely impressive, "my beloved nephew! You sit there opening my mail with the heart of a stone. You are saying to yourself: 'He is gone; there will be fine times ahead.' But there is one thing you have forgotten, Frederik: The Law of Reward and Punishment. Your hour has come—*to think!*"

Frederik, unheeding, continued to open, read, and sort the letters before him.

At the Dead Man's last words, his nephew picked from the heap a blue envelope, ripped it open, and pulled out the enclosures:—a single sheet of blue paper and a cheap photograph.

"Oh, my God! Oh, my *God!*" he babbled over and over, foolishly, staring from letter to photograph. "Here's luck! What luck it is! Anne Marie to my uncle! Lord! If he'd lived to read it! If he had read it! Out I'd have been kicked! One — two — three — *Augenblick!* Out into the street! Oh, what unbelievable luck! If she'd written to him ten days earlier! Ten little days!"

His hand shaking, he picked up the letter again, spread it wide, and began to read it, Peter Grimm standing behind him, looking over the reader's shoulder.

"Who's in the room!" he demanded

"Dear Mr. Grimm," the letter ran, "I have not written because I can't help Willem. And I am ashamed. Don't be too hard upon me, sir, in your thoughts. At first I often went hungry. And then the few pennies I had saved for him were spent. Now I see that I can never hope to get him back. Willem is far better off with you. I know he is. But, oh, how I wish I could just see him again! *Once.* Perhaps I could come there in the night time and no one would know——"

"Oh!" breathed Peter Grimm, between tight clenched teeth. "The pity of it! The *pity* of it!"

"Who's that?" cried Frederik, looking up with a start of terror from his perusal of the letter.

The young man peered about the shadows beyond the radius of the lamp, a nervous dread at his heart.

"Who's in the room!" he demanded, glancing behind him.

Then with a self-contemptuous shake of his head he muttered angrily:

"That's queer. I could have sworn somebody was looking over my shoulder. Bah! My nerves are going bad!"

He returned to the reading of the letter.

"I met some one from home to-day," went on Anne Marie's epistle. "If there's any truth in the rumour that Kathrien is going to marry Frederik, *it mustn't be,* Mr. Grimm. It must *not.* She must not marry him. For Frederik is my little boy's fa——"

"There *is* some one here!" muttered Frederik, laying down the letter.

Calming his disordered nerves once more, he glanced furtively up toward Willem's room in the bedroom gallery above his head. Then he picked up the photograph and looked at it long with eyes full of trouble and apprehension. It was the full-length cabinet likeness of a plainly dressed young woman with a pretty, slack face. And the face's weakness was half redeemed by a stamp of settled sadness that was not devoid of a certain dignity.

Frederik turned the photograph over. On the back he read:

"For my little boy, from Anne Marie."

His mouth twitched. Throngs of memories were crowding in upon him. And the eyes of the Dead Man were boring to his very soul. Something very like Conscience was stirring within

him. He laid the photograph face downward on the table and he bent his head forward upon his hands.

The young man was not a melodrama villain. He was not even a scoundrel, in the broad sense of the term. Weak, lazy, pleasure loving, he was what Peter Grimm had all unconsciously made him. As a dilettante, a man of leisure, or even comfortably engaged in some easy, congenial life work and with pleasant home surroundings, he would probably have developed few undesirable traits.

From boyhood he had been under the influence and orders of Peter Grimm. To be under Peter Grimm's supervision entailed one of three courses, according to the character of the person concerned: either to yield gracefully and gratefully to the old man's kindly but iron domination and find therein love and protection,—as had Kathrien; or to use the right of personal thought and individuality, and therefore to clash forever with Peter,—as had James Hartmann; or to seem for policy's sake to bend, while really living one's own life;—as had Frederik.

Peter Grimm was the slave and apostle of Order, Work, and Method. Frederik loved ease,

luxury, artistic surroundings. Yet he was too wise to antagonise his uncle, who had the power to leave him one day the master of all these pleasant things he craved. So he had adapted himself outwardly to a path he loathed. And, by the wayside, he had secretly sought such pleasures as his nature craved.

Anne Marie had chanced to be by the wayside.

What had followed was rendered tragic chiefly by Anne Marie's innate goodness and by Peter Grimm's fierce morality.

Frederik dared not risk the loss of a future fortune by admitting his fault or by marrying the woman for whom, at the time, he had really cared. In a shiftless way and with straitly limited income, he had done what he could do for her. The sacrifices these helps had entailed and the constant fear of exposure and of consequent disinheritance had in time made the thought of Anne Marie a horror to him.

When he had gone, at Peter Grimm's command, to Leyden and Heidelberg to study botany, Frederik had hoped to close the unsavoury incident for all time.

On his return he had found Willem, installed at the Grimm home, a living, ever-present menace

and reminder to him. And, despite a soft heart and a normally decent nature, Frederik had, little by little, been forced by his own past and his own hopes into a course that at times was hateful to him. Ten thousand men, far worse than he, walk the streets of every big city and sleep snug o' nights with no grinning Conscience-Skull to break their rest. A thousand well-meaning, harmless sons of dominating and domineering parents are forced, as was he, into by-roads as hateful to them. To be cast by Fate to enact the Villain, when one has not the temperament, the aptitude, nor the desire for the unsavoury rôle, falls to more men's lot than the world realises.

It had fallen to Frederik Grimm's. Wherefore, sick at heart, he sat with his head in his hands. And Peter Grimm read his thoughts as from a printed page.

"Once more a spark of manhood is alight in your soul," whispered the Dead Man. "It is not too late. Nothing is ever too late. Turn back!"

Frederik looked up, half-listening. His hand crept out to the letter.

"Follow the impulse that is in your heart," begged the Dead Man. "Follow it! Take the

little boy in your arms. Declare him to all the world as your own. Go down on your knees and ask his mother's forgiveness. Ah, do it, lad, so that I can go back still trusting you,—still believing in you,—blessing you! *Frederik!"*

"Yes," answered Frederik, starting up. "What is it?"

He glanced about the room unseeingly, then looked toward the outer door and called:

"Come in!"

"That's curious!" he mused, settling back in his chair. "I thought I heard some one at—*Who's at the door?"* he called again.

"I am at the door," replied the Dead Man in solemn vehemence. *"I,* Peter Grimm. The uncle who loved you and whom you tricked. Anne Marie is at the door,—the little girl who is ashamed to come home. Willem is at the door —your own flesh and blood—*nameless!* Katje, sobbing her heart out,—James—all of us. *All!* We are all at the door, Frederik! At the door of your conscience. Ah, don't keep us waiting!"

CHAPTER XV

A HALF-HEARD MESSAGE

FREDERIK rose slowly from his chair. His face was working. Instinctively his glance lifted to Kathrien's door. His eyes grew bright and his weak mouth strong with a wondrous resolve. He crossed the room to the stair-foot; that light of pure sacrifice deepening in his whole upraised face.

"Yes!" urged the Dead Man, keeping eager pace with him in body and in thought. "Yes! Call her. Give her back her promise."

The flabby muscles of a self-indulgent man may sometimes perform a single prodigious feat of strength. Wherein they have an infinite advantage over the far flabbier resolutions of a self-indulgent man. And Frederik Grimm's weak, atrophied better self was not equal to the strain thrown upon it.

At the stair-foot, his step faltered. He halted irresolutely, while the Dead Man watched him in an anguish of hope and fear.

Then came surrender to long habit; and with

it a gush of weak rage. Not at himself. He had not the strength left for that. But at the cause of his distress. He brought down his fist upon the desk with a resounding thwack. His eye fell on the open page with its pathetic scrawl of appeal.

"Damn her!" he growled, snatching up the letter and tearing it across and across. "I wish to God I'd never seen her!"

Peter Grimm gazed down upon him with eyes wherein lurked a slowly rising fire.

"Frederik Grimm!" commanded the Dead Man. "Get up! Stand up before me! Stand up, I say!"

Frederik made as though to rise, then swore under his breath and sat down again.

"Stand up!" flashed the Dead Man.

Frederik got shamblingly to his feet, and looked around with a frown, as though wondering why he had risen. His gaze swept the desk for some cause for his action, then rested moodily on the dying embers in the hearth.

The Dead Man at the far side of the desk confronted him like some unearthly Judge from whose heart pity, humanity, and all else but righteous wrath were banished.

"You shall not have my little girl!" thundered Peter Grimm. "I have come back to take her away from you. And you cannot put me to rest. I have come back. You cannot drive me from your thoughts."

He touched Frederik's damp forehead with his forefinger.

"I am *there,*" he said. "I am looking over your shoulder as you read or write or think. I am looking in at the window when you deem you are alone and unseen. *I have come back.* You are breathing me in the air. I am hammering at your heart in each of your pulse beats. Wherever you are, I am there."

His forced calmness gave way to a gust of helpless rage as he felt his words falling upon world-deafened ears.

"Hear me!" he commanded furiously. "*Hear* me! You *shall* hear me!"

At each frenzied repetition of the command, the Dead Man hurled his arms aloft and brought down his clenched fist with all his power upon the desk in mighty blows of utterly soundless violence.

Impotently he cried aloud:

"Oh, will *no* one hear me? Has my journey

been all in vain? Has it been useless?—worse than useless?"

The Dead Man looked upward, in an anguish of desperation. He seemed to be entreating the Unseen in his clamour of wild, hopeless appeal.

"Has it all been for nothing?" he wailed. "Must we forever stand or fall by the mistakes we make in this world? Is there *no* second chance?"

Frederik shook his head angrily as though to banish clinging unwelcome thoughts from his brain, got up and crossed to the sideboard, where he poured himself a double drink of liquor and swigged it down with feverish eagerness.

As he left the desk, Marta entered from the kitchen with the light supper he had ordered:—coffee, with sugar and cream, and a plate of little cakes. She went to the desk and began clearing a space among the scattered papers for the supper tray. As her free hand moved among the papers, the Dead Man was at her elbow.

"Marta!" he whispered, as though fearing his words might reach Frederik. "Look! *Look!*"

He pointed excitedly to the torn letter and the photograph that lay face downward under

her hand. And she picked up both letter and picture, to make room for the tray.

"Marta!" urged the Dead Man, almost incoherent in his wild haste. "See what you have there! Look down at that picture in your hand! Turn it over and *look* at it! Look at the handwriting on that torn letter! Look quickly! Then run with them to Miss Kathrien. Make her piece the letter together and read it! Quick! It's the only way she can learn the truth. Frederik will never tell her. Marta!—*Ah!*"

His wild plea broke off in a cry of chagrin. For Frederik, turning from the sideboard, had seen the old woman.

"Your coffee, Mynheer Frederik," said she, laying down the photograph and letter without a glance at them.

"Yes, yes. Of course," answered Frederik. "I forgot. Thanks."

She turned to leave the room. Frederik, coming over to the desk, caught sight of the torn blue envelope and the picture, where she had laid them.

Hurriedly covering them with his hand, he glanced at her in quick, terrified suspicion. But the face she turned to him as she hesitated for a

moment at the kitchen door showed him at once that he was safe. Nevertheless, Marta lingered on the threshold.

"Well?" queried Frederik, seating himself beside the tray.

"Is there," she stammered, "is there no—no word—no letter——?"

"Word? Letter?" he echoed nervously. "What do you mean?"

"From——" began the old woman in timid hesitation, then in a rush of courage: "From my little girl. From Anne Marie."

"No!" he snapped. "Of course not. I——"

"But—at a time like this—if she knows—oh, I felt it,—I hoped—that there would be *some* message from her! Every day I have hoped——"

"No," he broke in. "Nothing's come. No letter. No word of any sort from her. I'd have let you know if there had. By the way, I have an appointment at the hotel in a few minutes. Tell Miss Kathrien, if she asks for me."

He busied himself with the tray. Marta looked at him a moment longer, held by some power that she could not explain. Then years of habit overcame impulse. She courtesied and withdrew to her kitchen.

As the door shut behind her, Frederik caught up the torn blue letter. Tossing it in a metal ash tray he struck a match. Peter Grimm, divining his intent, sprang forward with a wordless cry to stop him. The Dead Man's hands tore at the wrists of the Living; sought by main strength to snatch the paper out of his reach; with pitiful helplessness tried to thrust back the hand that held the lighted match.

Unknowingly, Frederik touched the flame to the paper, shook out the match, and watched the torn letter blaze and curl. Then he tossed the charred bits into a jardinière on the floor, and picked up the picture.

"There's an end to *that!*" he murmured, turning to throw the photograph into the smoking embers of the fireplace.

Peter Grimm stood erect. A new hope drove the sick despair from his face. Looking toward Willem's room he raised his arm and beckoned.

At once the door stealthily opened. A white little figure slipped out onto the gallery and toward the stairs. Down the flight of steps, clad in his white flannel pajama suit, his eyes wide, his yellow hair tumbled, Willem ran.

Frederik, in the act of consigning the photo-

graph to the fire, was arrested by the sound of pattering feet. Laying the picture on the desk, he turned guiltily, in time to see Willem speeding across the room toward the bay window.

"What are you doing down here?" demanded Frederik. "If you're so sick, you ought not to get out of bed. That's the place for sick boys."

"The circus!" mumbled Willem in the queer, strained voice of a sleep walker. "The circus music waked me up. So I had to come and hear it."

"Circus music?" repeated Frederik amazedly, as he watched the boy tugging at the rain-tightened window sash to force it upward.

"Yes, it woke me. I can see the parade if I can get this window open. It——"

"Why, you're half asleep!" exclaimed Frederik. "The circus left town ten days ago!"

"No, no!" insisted Willem, raising the window with one final wrench of his frail arms. "The band's playing *now*. Hear it?"

A gust of chilly, wet air dashed in through the open window, sending a sharp draught across the room and waking the boy wide as it beat into his hot face.

"Why," babbled Willem, rubbing his eyes, and staring about him, "why, it's *night* time! I wonder what made me think the circus was here. I— I guess it was a dream."

Frederik strode to the window impatiently and slammed it shut. As he passed Willem on the way back to the desk the boy intuitively cowered away from him.

"You've had a fever," said Frederik crossly, "and you're liable to catch cold, wandering around this draughty old barn in your night clothes. Go back to bed."

"Yes, sir," whimpered the boy, cringing under the sharp tone and starting back for the stairs. But, before he reached the lowest step, he halted. Peter Grimm stood barring his way. For a moment the Dead Man and the child stood face to face. Then, still frightened but unable to resist, Willem turned back toward Frederik, who had just picked up the photograph once more; to put it in the smouldering ashes.

"Mynheer Frederik," asked the boy in a voice not his own, "where is Anne Marie?"

"What?" barked Frederik with an uncontrollable start and whipping the photograph around behind his back like a guilty child caught in theft.

"What's that? Anne Marie? Why do you ask *me* about her? How should *I* know?"

He turned his back on the boy and began to tear the photograph into tiny bits. Willem hesitated, then went back to the stairway. Again at the foot of the steps he confronted the Dead Man. Again they stood for an instant, looking wordlessly into each other's eyes. And again Willem turned back into the room.

"Mynheer Frederik," he asked in a sort of dazed bewilderment, "*where* is Mynheer Grimm?"

"Eh? Mynheer Grimm? Dead, of course. Dead."

"Are—are you *sure?* Because just now——"

"Oh, go to bed! At once, do you hear! Go, or I'll have you punished!"

Under this dire threat and the scowl that went with it, not even the Dead Man's power could stem Willem's defeat. Up the stairs he scuttled. At the door of his room, the fever thirst in his hot, parched throat for the moment overcame fear.

"Could—could I have a drink of water?" he whimpered, gazing longingly down at the full ice-water pitcher on the sideboard.

An angry glance from Frederik sent him into his own room like a rabbit into its warren.

Frederik, the fragments of the picture clenched in his sweat-damp hand, glowered after the retreating lad and took a step toward the fire. The movement brought him close to the desk. The lamp had suddenly burned very low. But for the faint gleam of firelight the room was in almost total darkness.

And out of that gloom leaped a Face. A Face close to Frederik's own;—a Face indescribably awful in its aspect of unearthly menace. The face of Peter Grimm. Not kindly and rugged as in life, or even as since the Dead Man's return. But terrible, accusing, bathed in a lurid glow.

Frederik, with a scream of crass horror, reeled back. The bits of cardboard tumbled from his fear-loosened grip and strewed the surface of the desk.

"My God!" croaked Frederik, his throat sanded with terror. "My God! Oh, my *God!*"

The Face was gone. The room was in shadow again and very silent. The dropping of a charred ember from andiron to hearth made the panic-stricken man jump convulsively.

Scarce breathing, crouched in a position of grotesque fright, the fear-sweat streaming down his face, Frederik Grimm peered about him through the flickering gloom. The place seemed peopled with elusive Shapes. His teeth clicked together as his loosened jaw was nerve-racked. He shivered from head to foot.

"I—I thought——" he began, half aloud.

Then he fell silent, afraid of his own voice in that dreadful silence. For a moment he cowered, numb, inert. Then he remembered the fragments of the photograph that still strewed the table.

"I must get rid of them," he thought.

He took an apprehensive step toward the desk. But the memory of what he had seen there was too potent. He knew he could no more approach that spot than he could walk into a den of rattlesnakes. He halted, sweating, aghast. Again he crept forward,—a step—two steps—in the direction of the torn picture. But his fears clogged his feet and brought him to a shivering standstill. Had the wealth of the world lain strewed on that desk instead of a mere handful of scattered pasteboard bits he could not have summoned courage to step forth and seize it.

The Dead Man, in the shadows, read his mind and smiled.

"No one's likely to come in here till I get back," Frederik told himself, in self-excuse for his cowardice. "And if any one does, the picture is too badly torn to be recognised. I——"

He found that his terror-ridden subconsciousness was backing his trembling body toward the outer door. The door that led from that haunted room—from the desk he dared not go near,—out into the safe, peace-giving night of summer.

And, snatching up his hat and stick, the shuddering, white-faced young master of the Grimm fortune half-stumbled, half-ran, from his home.

"Hicks's lawyer will be waiting," he said to his battered self-respect. "I'm late as it is. I must hurry."

And hurry he did, nor checked his rapid pace until he had reached his destination.

Scarce had the door banged shut after Frederik when Peter Grimm raised his eyes once more toward Willem's room. And again the little white-clad figure appeared, and tiptoed toward the stair head.

Willem paused a moment, looked over the banisters to make certain that Frederik had gone, then

stole down to the big living-room. His cheeks were flushed with fever. He was tired all over. His head throbbed. And his throat was unbearably dry. The perpetual thirst of childhood, augmented by the gnawing, unbearable thirst of fever, sent him speeding to the sideboard. He picked up the big ice-water pitcher,—chilled and frosted by inner cold and outer dampness—and poured out a glassful of the stingingly cold water. The boy gulped down the contents of the glass in almost a single draught. Then he filled a second glass and, with epicurean delight, let the water trickle slowly and coolingly down his hot throat. Peter Grimm stood beside him, a gentle hand on the thin little shoulder. His thirst slaked, Willem glanced fearfully toward the front door.

"Oh, he won't come back for a long time," Peter Grimm soothed him. "Don't be afraid. He went out in a hurry and he hasn't yet stopped hurrying. He—thought he saw *me*."

Willem, reassured, laid his burning cheek against the frosted, icy side of the pitcher. A smile of utter bliss overspread his face.

"My, but it feels good!" sighed the boy.

The Dead Man continued to look down at him with an infinite pity.

"Willem," said he, stroking the tousled head and smoothing away its stabbing pain, "there are some little soldiers in this world who are handicapped when they come into Life's battlefield. Their parents haven't fitted them for the fight. Poor little moon-moths! They look in at the lighted windows. They beat at the panes. They see the glow of happy firesides,—the lamps of bright homes. But they can never get in. You are one of those little wanderers, Willem. And children like you are a million times happier when they are spared the truth. So it's the most beautiful thing that can happen for you, that before your playing time is over—before you begin a man's bitterly hard, grinding toil,—all the care—all the tears, all the worries, all the sorrows are going to pass you by forever. God is going to lay His dear hand on your head. There is always a place for such little children as you at His side. There is none in this small, harsh, unpitying old world. If people knew—if they understood—I don't think they could be so cruel as to bring such children into the world, to carry terrible burdens. They *don't* know. But God does. And that is why He is going to take you to Him. It will be the most wonderful—

the most beautiful thing that could happen to you."

Willem smiled dreamily. Then he took a long, ecstatic drink out of the pitcher itself, set it down, and rose to his feet. He felt suddenly better. For the time the water had cooled him. The racking headache was smoothed away. And, childlike, he had no desire whatever to cut short his surreptitious good time by going to bed. He looked about him for new objects of interest.

"Willem," went on the Dead Man, "of all this whole household, you are the only one who really feels I am here. The only one who can almost see me. The only one who can help me. I have a little message for you to give Katje, and I've something to show you."

He pointed toward the desk, where lay the fragments of the picture. The firelight was strong enough now to make them plainly visible. Willem's eyes followed the direction of the pointing hand. But his glance, as it reached the desk, fell upon something infinitely more attractive than any mere photograph. He saw the tray placed there by Marta and left untouched by Frederik.

"I'm awful hungry!" observed the boy.

"H'm!" commented Peter Grimm, as Willem

started across the room to investigate the mysteriously alluring tray. "I see I can't get any help from a youngster as long as his stomach is calling."

"Good!" ejaculated Willem as he spied the plate of cakes.

"Help yourself!" invited Peter Grimm.

The boy obeyed the suggestion before it was made. Already his mouth was full of cake and his jaws were working rapturously.

"*Das is lecker!*" he murmured, biting into another of the cakes.

He picked a large and obese raisin from a third, swallowed it, then reached for the sugar bowl. Two lumps of sugar went the way of the raisin. After which a handful of sugar lumps were stuffed into his night-clothes' pocket for future delectation in bed. The cream pitcher next met the forager's eye. Willem looked at it longingly.

"Take it," said Peter Grimm. "It's good, thick, sweet cream. Drink it down. That's right. It won't hurt you. Nothing can hurt you now."

"I haven't had such a good time," Willem confided to his inner consciousness, "since Mynheer Grimm died. Why"—he broke off, his roving gaze concentrating on the hat-rack—

"there's his hat! It's—he's *here!* Oh, Mynheer Grimm!" he wailed aloud in utter longing. "Take me back with you!"

"You know I'm here?" asked the Dead Man joyously. "Can you see me?"

"No, sir," came the answer without a breath of hesitation or any hint of misunderstanding.

"Here," ordered Peter Grimm, his face alight, "take my hand. Have you got it?"

He placed his right hand around the boy's groping palm.

"No, sir," replied Willem.

"Now," urged Peter Grimm, enclosing the boy's hand in both his own, "do you feel it?"

"I—I feel *something,*" returned Willem, in doubt. "Yes, sir. But where is your hand? There's—there's nothing there!"

"But you *hear* me?" asked the Dead Man anxiously.

"I—I can't *really* hear you. It's some kind of a dream, I suppose. Isn't it? Oh, Mynheer Grimm!" he pleaded brokenly. "Take me back with you!"

"You're not quite ready to go with me, yet," said the Dead Man in gentle denial. "Not till you can *see* me."

The boy reached out for another cake. Still looking straight ahead where he imagined his unseen protector might be, he asked:

"What did you come back for, Mynheer Grimm? Wasn't it nice where you went?"

"Oh, yes! Beyond all belief, dear lad. But I had to come back. Willem, do you think you could take a message for me? Listen very carefully now. Because I want you to remember every word of it. I want you to try to understand. You are to tell Miss Kathrien——"

"It's too bad you died before you could go to the circus, Mynheer Grimm," broke in Willem, munching the cake.

"Willem," persisted the Dead Man, patiently starting his plan of campaign all over again from another angle, "there must be a great many things you remember,—things that happened when you lived with your mother. Aren't there?"

"I was very little," hesitated Willem, echoing a phrase he had once heard Marta use in speaking of his earlier days.

"Still," pursued the Dead Man, "you remember?"

"I—I was afraid," replied the boy, groping

back in the blurred past for a fact and seizing on a gruesomely prominent one.

"Try to think back to that time," urged Peter Grimm. "You loved—*her?*"

"Oh, I *did* love Anne Marie!" exclaimed the child.

"Now," pointed out the Dead Man, "through that one little miracle of love you can remember many things that are tucked away in the back of your baby brain. Hey? Things that a single spark could kindle and light up and make clear to you. It comes back? Think! There were you—and Anne Marie——"

"And the Other One," suggested Willem on impulse.

"So! And who was the 'Other One'?"

"I'm afraid——" babbled the child.

And again the Dead Man shifted the form of his questions to quiet the nervous dread that had sprung into the big eyes.

"Willem," said he, "what would you rather see than anything else in all this world? Think. Something that every little boy loves?"

"I—I like the circus," hazarded Willem, setting his tired wits to work at this possible conundrum, "and the clowns, and——"

He hesitated. Peter Grimm motioned toward the photograph's fragments on the desk.

"——and my mother," finished the boy.

Then, his gaze following the Dead Man's gesture, he caught sight of part of a pictured face, torn diagonally across. With a cry he picked it up.

"Why," he exclaimed, "there she is! There's her face,—part of it. And," fumbling among the torn bits of cardboard, "there's the other part. It's a picture of Anne Marie. All torn up."

"It would be fun to put it together," suggested Peter Grimm, "the way you did with those picture puzzles I got you once. Suppose we try?"

The idea caught the child's fancy. With knitted brows and puckered lips he bent over the desk and began the task of piecing the scraps into a whole.

"That's right," approved the Dead Man. "Put it all together until the picture is all perfect. —See, there's the bit you are looking for to finish off the shoulder,—and then we must show it to everybody in the house, and set them all to thinking."

With an apprehensive glance over his shoulder toward the front door Willem proceeded more

hurriedly with his work of joining the strewn pieces.

"I must get it put together before *he* comes back," he muttered.

"Ah!" mutely rejoiced the Dean Man, "I'm making you think about *him* at last! I'll succeed in getting your mind to connect him with Anne Marie by the time the others——"

"'Uncle Rat has gone to town! Ha-*H'M!*'"

chanted Willem under his breath as his fingers moved from part to part of the nearly completed picture. "'*To buy his niece a wedding gown.*'—There's her hand!" he interrupted himself as an elusive scrap of the photograph was at last discovered and put into place.

Peter Grimm's eyes were fixed on the door of Kathrien's room in a compelling stare.

"Her other hand!" mused Willem. "'*What shall the wedding breakfast be? Ha-H'M! What shall the*——?' Where's—here's the last two parts. There! It's *done!* Oh, Anne Marie! Mamma! I——"

The door of Kathrien's room opened. The girl, under a spell of the Dead Man's will, came out to the banisters.

CHAPTER XVI

THE "SENSITIVE"

KATHRIEN, looking down into the firelit room, saw the white-clad boy starting up in triumph with his work.

"Why, Willem!" she cried, dumfounded at sight of the invalid out of bed at such an hour. "What are you doing down there? You ought to——"

"Oh, Miss Kathrien!" exclaimed the child, pointing toward the picture. "Come down, quick!"

"You mustn't get out of bed like this when you're ill," gently reproved Kathrien. "I had a feeling that you weren't in your room. That is why I came out to look. Come——"

"But, look!" insisted Willem, pointing again at the picture puzzle he had so painstakingly pieced together. "Look, Miss Kathrien!"

"Come, dear!" admonished Kathrien. "You must not play down there. Wait a minute, and I'll make your bed again. It will be more com-

fortable for you if it's made over. Then you must come right upstairs."

She went to the sick room and set to work with deft speed rearranging the tumbled sheets and smoothing the rumpled pillows. Willem looked down at his disregarded picture and his lip trembled. He gazed about the room in the hope of seeing Peter Grimm. He strained his keen ears for sound of the Dead Man's gentle, comforting voice.

But Peter Grimm was looking fixedly toward the dining-room door. And in a moment it opened and Mrs. Batholommey bustled in.

"I thought I heard some one call," observed the rector's wife for the benefit of any one who might be in the half-lighted room.

Then, as her eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, she espied Willem.

"*Why!*" she cackled. "Of all things! You naughty, *naughty* child! You ought to be in bed and asleep!"

Willem shrank under the rebuke, but a touch of Peter Grimm's hand and a whispered word of encouragement braced him to reply:

"Old Mynheer Grimm's come back."

In the midst of her tirade Mrs. Batholommey

stopped, open-mouthed. She stared at the boy in dismay. His face, as well as his voice, was unperturbed. He had stated merely what seemed to him a perfectly natural but very welcome truth. He had supposed she would be pleased, not petrified. He had told her the news in the hope of averting a scolding. But she did not seem to take it in the sense of his simple declaration. So he repeated it.

"Old Mynheer Grimm's come back, Mrs. Batholommey."

She gurgled wordlessly, then sputtered:

"What are you talking about, child? 'Old Mynheer Grimm,' as you call him, is dead. You know that."

"No, he isn't," stoutly contradicted Willem. "He's come back. He's in this room right now. At least," he added as he glanced about and could not feel the Dead Man's presence, "at least he was a minute ago. I know, because I've been talking to him."

"Absurd!"

"I've been talking to him. He was standing just where you are now."

Mrs. Batholommey instinctively started. In fact, despite her age and bulk and the fact that

she was built for endurance rather than for speed, she jumped high into the air, with an incredible lightness and agility, and came to earth several feet away from the spot Willem had designated.

"At least," explained the boy, "he *seemed* to be about there. But he seemed to be *everywhere.*"

Recovering her smashed self-poise, Mrs. Batholommey frowned with lofty majesty, tempered by womanly concern.

"You are feverish again," she said. "I hoped you were all over it. You're light-headed, you poor little fellow."

Kathrien, the bed being re-made, hurried downstairs to get Willem.

"His mind is wandering," said Mrs. Batholommey. "He imagines all sorts of ridiculous, impossible things."

Kathrien dropped into a chair by the fire and gathered the fragile little body into her lap.

"Yes," went on Mrs. Batholommey, "he is out of his head. I think I'll run over and get the doctor."

"You need not trouble to," said Peter Grimm. "*I* have sent for him. Though he doesn't know it. He is coming up the walk."

The Dead Man turned toward the front door, the old quizzical smile on his lips.

"Come in, Andrew," he said. "I'm going to give you one more chance at the theory you were wise enough to form and are not wise enough to practise."

Dr. McPherson entered.

"I thought I'd just drop in for a minute before bedtime," said he, "to see how Willem——"

"Oh, Doctor!" cried Mrs. Batholommey. "This is providential. I was just coming to get you. Here's Willem. We found he'd gotten out of bed and wandered down here. He is worse. Much worse. He's quite delirious."

"H'm!" commented Dr. McPherson, touching the child's face and then laying a finger on the fast, light pulse. "He doesn't look it. He has a slight fever again, but——"

"Oh, he said old Mr. Grimm was here!" bleated Mrs. Batholommey. "Here in this room with him."

"What?" gasped Kathrien.

But the doctor seemed to regard the statement as the most natural thing imaginable.

"In this room?" he repeated in a matter of

fact tone. "Well, very possibly he is. There's nothing so remarkable about that, is there?"

"Nothing *remarkable?*" squealed Mrs. Batholommey; then, bridling, she scoffed: "Oh, of course. I forgot. You believe in——"

"In fact," pursued McPherson, getting under weigh with his pet idea, "you'll remember, both of you, that I told you he and I made a compact to——"

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Batholommey with a shudder. "That absurd, horrible 'compact' you told us about! It was positively blasphemous!"

But McPherson was looking speculatively down at Willem, and did not accept nor even hear the challenge to combat.

"I've sometimes had the idea," said he, "that the boy was a 'sensitive.' And this evening, I've been wondering——"

"No, you haven't, Andrew," denied Peter Grimm. "It's *I* who have been doing the 'wondering'; through that Scotch brain of yours. *I'm* making use of that Spiritualistic hobby of yours because you're too dense to hear me except through some rarer mortal's voice."

"——Wondering," continued the doctor, "whether—perhaps——"

"Yes," declared Peter Grimm, as McPherson hesitated, "the boy is a 'sensitive,' as you call it."

"I really believe," declared McPherson, his last doubts vanishing, "that Willem *is* a 'sensitive.' I'm certain of it. And——"

"A 'sensitive'?" queried Kathrien. "What's that?"

"Well," reflected the doctor, "it is rather hard to define in simple language. A 'sensitive' is what is sometimes known as a 'medium.' A human organism so constructed that it can be 'informed,' or 'controlled' (as the phrases go) by those who are—who have—er—who have—passed over."

He looked apologetically about as if to assure the possibly-present Peter Grimm that he had absolutely no intent of using so non-technical a word as "dead."

Peter Grimm acknowledged the compliment with a laugh.

"Oh, say it, Andrew! Say it!" he adjured. "There *is* no 'death' and there are no 'dead,' as this world understands the words. So one term is as good as another. 'Dead' or 'passed over.' It's all one. Neither phrase means anything. Don't be afraid of offending me."

"And Willem is like that?" asked Kathrien.

"I am sure of it," answered McPherson. "Now, Willem——"

"I think I'd better put the boy to bed!" hastily interposed Mrs. Batholommey, coming between the doctor and his proposed "subject."

"Please!" rapped McPherson. "I propose to find out what ails Willem. That is what I'm here for. And I'll thank you not to interfere, Mrs. Batholommey. I never break in on your good husband's pulpit platitudes, and I'll ask you to show the same courtesy toward *me*. Now then, Willem——"

"Kathrien," expostulated Mrs. Batholommey, "you surely aren't going to permit——?"

A peremptory gesture from McPherson momentarily checked the pendulum of her tongue. Kathrien, too, was very evidently on the doctor's side.

"Willem," said McPherson quietly, "you said just now that Mr. Grimm was in this room. What made you think so?"

"The things he said to me," returned Willem, readily enough.

His simple reply had a galvanic effect on his three hearers.

"*Said* to you?" bleated Mrs. Batholommey. "*Said?* Did you say 'said'?"

"Why, Willem!" gasped Kathrien.

"*Old* Mr. Grimm?" insisted Dr. McPherson. "Willem, you're certain you mean *old* Mr. Grimm? Not Frederik?"

"Why, yes," assented Willem with calm assurance. "Old Mynheer Grimm."

And now, even Mrs. Batholommey's awed curiosity dulled her chronic conscience-pains into momentary rest. And, with Kathrien, she sat silent, eager, awaiting the doctor's next move.

"And," continued McPherson, "what did Mr. Grimm say to you? Think carefully before you answer."

"Oh," replied Willem, in the glorious vagueness of childhood, "lots and lots of things."

"Oh, really?" mocked Mrs. Batholommey, the disappointing answer freeing her from the grip of awe.

Again McPherson raised a warning hand that balked further comment from her. And he returned to the examination.

"Willem," said he, "how did Mr. Grimm look?"

"I didn't see him," answered the child.

"H'm!" sniffed Mrs. Batholommey.

"But, Willem," urged McPherson, "you must have seen *something.*"

"I—I thought I saw his hat on the peg," hesitated the boy.

All eyes turned involuntarily and in some fear toward the hat-rack.

"No," went on Willem, looking at the vacant peg, "it's gone now."

"Doctor," remonstrated Mrs. Batholommey, impatiently, "this is so silly! It——"

"I wonder," whispered Kathrien to McPherson over the boy's head, "I wonder if he really *did*—do you think——?"

She did not finish the sentence. A growing look of disappointment and troubled doubt on McPherson's grim face made her reluctant to voice the question that her mind had formed.

"Willem!" said the Dead Man earnestly, pointing towards the pieced-together picture as he spoke. "Look! Show it to her!"

"Look!" echoed Willem, pointing in turn to the photograph. "Look, Miss Kathrien! That's what I wanted to show you when you called to me to go to bed."

"Why!" exclaimed Kathrien, following the direction of the eager little finger. "It's his mother! It's Anne Marie!"

"His mother!" echoed Mrs. Batholommey, focussing her near-sighted eyes on the likeness. "Why, so it is! Well, of all things! I didn't know you'd heard from Anne Marie."

"We haven't," said Kathrien.

"Then how did the photograph get into the house?"

"I don't know," answered the girl. "I never saw the picture before. It is none we've had. How strange! We've all been waiting for news of Anne Marie. Even her own mother doesn't know where she is, and hasn't heard from her in years. Or—or maybe Marta has received the picture since I——"

"I'll ask her," said Mrs. Batholommey, all eagerness now that something tangible was before her.

She bustled off into the kitchen in search of the old housekeeper.

"If Marta didn't get it," mused Kathrien, her face strained with puzzling thoughts, "who *did* have this picture? And why weren't the rest of us told? Every one knew how eager we were for

news of Anne Marie. And who tore up the picture? Did you, Willem?"

"No!" declared the boy. "It *was* lying here, torn. I mended it."

"But," persisted Kathrien, "there's been no one at this desk,—except Frederik.—Except Frederik," she repeated, half under her breath.

Mrs. Batholommey came back from her kitchen interview, bubbling with importance.

"No," she announced, "Marta hasn't heard a word from Anne Marie. And only a few minutes ago she asked Frederik if any message had come. And he said, no, there hadn't."

"I wonder," suggested Kathrien, "if there *was* any message with the photograph."

"I remember," volunteered Mrs. Batholommey, "one of the letters that came for poor old Mr. Grimm was in a blue envelope and felt as if it had a photograph in it. I put it with some others in the desk and I told Frederik about it this evening."

Kathrien glanced over the desk and at the floor around it in search of further clues. She saw, in the jardinière, the charred remnants of a letter and pointed it out to the others. She drew from the débris the unburned corner of a blue envelope.

"That's the one!" cried Mrs. Batholommey. "That's it! The same colour."

"You say the envelope was addressed to my uncle?"

"Yes. It gave me such a turn to see those letters all addressed to a man who wasn't alive to——"

"Oh, what does it all mean?" cried the girl.

"We are going to find out," said McPherson with sudden determination. "Kathrien, draw those window shades close. I want the room darkened as much as possible."

"Oh, Doctor," protested Mrs. Batholommey as Kathrien hastened to obey, "you're surely not going to——?"

"Be quiet. You needn't stay unless you want to."

"Oh, I'll stay. It's my duty. But I don't approve. Please understand that."

Kathrien had returned to her place by the fire and had lifted Willem back on her lap. The doctor, gazing into space, said in a low, reverential tone:

"Peter Grimm! If you have come back to us, if you are in this room—if this boy has spoken truly,—give us some sign, some indication——"

"Why, Andrew, I can't," answered the Dead Man. "Not to *you*. I have, to the boy. I can't make you hear me, Andrew. The obstacles are too strong for me."

"Peter Grimm," went on the doctor after a moment of dead silence, "if you cannot make your presence known to me—and I realise there must be great difficulties—will you try to send your message by Willem? I presume you *have* a message?"

Another space of tense silence.

"Well, Peter," resumed McPherson patiently, "I am waiting. We are all waiting."

"Then stop talking and listen to Willem," ordered Peter Grimm.

The doctor involuntarily glanced at the boy. Willem's wide-open eyes were glazed like a sleepwalker's. The hands that had been folded in his lap now hung limply at his sides. His lips parted, and droning, mechanical, lifeless words came from between them.

"There was Anne Marie—and me—and the Other One," said he.

"What Other One?" asked McPherson, speaking in a low, emotionless voice so as not to break in on the thought current.

"The man that came there," droned the boy.

"What man?"

"The man that made Anne Marie cry."

"What man made Anne Marie cry?"

"I—I can't remember," returned the boy, a hesitant note of trouble creeping into his dead voice.

"Yes, you can," prompted Peter Grimm. "You *can* remember, Willem. You're afraid!"

"So you *do* remember the time when you were with Anne Marie?" whispered Kathrien as the lad hesitated. "You always told me you didn't. Doctor, I have the strangest feeling. A feeling that all this somehow concerns *me,* and that I must sift it to the bottom. Think, Willem. Who was it that came and went at the house where you lived with Anne Marie?"

"That is what *I* asked you, Willem," said Peter Grimm.

"That is what *he* asked me," replied Willem mechanically.

"Who?" demanded McPherson. "Who asked you that question, Willem?"

"Mynheer Grimm."

"When?"

"Just now."

"Just now!" cried Kathrien and Mrs. Batholommey in a breath.

"S-sh!" admonished the doctor. "So you both asked the same question, eh? The man that came to see——?"

"It can't be possible," expostulated Mrs. Batholommey, "that the boy has any idea what he is talking about."

A glare from McPherson silenced her. Then the doctor asked:

"What did you tell Mr. Grimm, Willem?"

The boy hesitated.

"Better make haste," adjured the Dead Man, "Frederik is coming back."

Willem, with a shudder, glanced fearfully toward the outer door.

"Why does he do that?" wondered Kathrien. "He looked that way at the door when he spoke of 'the Other One.' Why should he?"

"He's afraid," answered Peter Grimm.

"I'm afraid," echoed Willem.

Kathrien gathered him more closely in her warm young arms and whispered soothingly to him. The fear died out of his eyes.

"You're not afraid, any more?" she reassured him.

"N-no," he faltered, "but—oh, *please* don't let Mynheer Frederik come back, Miss Kathrien! *Please,* don't! Because—because then I'll be afraid again. I know I will."

McPherson whistled low and long. A light was beginning to break upon his shrewd Scotch brain.

"Willem!" pleaded the Dead Man. *"Willem!"*

"Yes, sir," answered the boy.

"You must say I am very unhappy."

"He is very unhappy," repeated Willem, parrot-like.

"Why is he unhappy?" demanded McPherson. "Ask him?"

"Why are you unhappy, Mynheer Grimm?" droned the boy.

"On account of Kathrien's future," replied Peter Grimm.

"What?" questioned Willem, who did not quite understand the meaning of the words "account" and "future."

"To-morrow——" began the Dead Man.

"To-morrow——" droned Willem.

"Kathrien's——" continued Peter Grimm.

"Your——" said the boy, glancing at Kathrien.

"Kathrien's?" asked the doctor. "Is he speaking about Kathrien?"

"What is it, Willem?" begged the girl. "What about me, to-morrow?"

"Kathrien must not marry Frederik," said Peter Grimm, as if teaching a simple lesson to a very stupid pupil.

"Kathrien——" began the boy, then flinching, and once more glancing fearfully over his shoulder toward the door, he whimpered:

"Oh, I must not say that!"

"Say *what,* Willem?" urged McPherson.

"What—what he wanted me to say!"

"Kathrien must not marry Frederik Grimm," repeated the Dead Man. "Say it, Willem?"

"Speak up, Willem," exhorted McPherson. "Don't be scared. No one will hurt you."

"Oh, yes," denied Willem, in terror, "*he* will. I don't *want* to say his name! Because—because——"

"Why won't you tell his name?" insisted McPherson.

"Hurry, Willem! Hurry!" begged the Dead Man.

"Oh," wailed Willem, with another terrified glance at the door, "I'm afraid! I'm *afraid!*

He'll make Anne Marie cry again. And me! And *me!*"

"Why are you afraid of him?" asked Kathrien. "Was Frederik the man that came to see Anne Marie——?"

"Kathrien!" primly reproved Mrs. Batholommey.

Kathrien caught hold of the boy's hand as he rose, shaking, to his feet. She knelt before him.

"Willem!" she implored. "Was Frederik the man who came to see Anne Marie? *Tell* me!"

"Surely," expostulated Mrs. Batholommey in pious horror, "surely, Kathrien, you don't believe——?"

"I have thought of a great many things this evening," replied Kathrien, vibrant with excitement, yet instinctively lowering her voice so as not to break in on Willem's semi-trance. "Little things that I've never noticed before. I'm putting them together. Just as Willem put that picture together. And I must know who the Other One was."

"Hurry, Willem!" exhorted the Dead Man. "Hurry! Frederik is listening at the door."

The announcement brought Willem around with

a gasp toward the door. He stared at its panels, quaking, aghast.

"I won't say any more!" he whimpered, pointing at the door. "*He's* there!"

"Who was the man, Willem?" entreated McPherson. "Come, lad! Out with it!"

"Quick, Willem!" supplemented Peter Grimm.

Kathrien, acting on an unexplained impulse as Willem stared terror-stricken at the door, hastened toward the vestibule.

"No! No!" shrieked the boy in anguished falsetto as he divined what she was about to do. "Please, *please* don't! *Don't! Don't* let him in. I'm afraid of him. He made Anne Marie cry."

But Kathrien's hand was already at the latch. She threw the outer door wide open. Frederik Grimm stood on the threshold, his head still a little forward. His ear had evidently been pressed close to the panel.

"You're sure Frederik's the man?" almost shouted McPherson.

"I won't tell! I won't tell! *I won't tell!*" screamed the boy, taking one look at Frederik, then tearing loose from McPherson's restraining hand and dashing up the stairs.

"I must go to bed now," sobbed Willem from the gallery above. "*He* told me to."

He ran into his own room and shut the door quickly behind him.

"You're a good boy, Willem!" Peter Grimm called approvingly after him.

The cloud of grief was gone from the Dead Man's face, leaving it wondrously bright and young. With no trace of anxiety, he turned to witness the consummation of his labours.

Frederik Grimm was standing, nerveless, dazed, where Kathrien's impulsive opening of the door had disclosed him. Dully, he stared from one to another of the three who confronted him. It was Kathrien who first spoke. Pointing toward the photograph that still lay on the desk, she said:

"Frederik, you have heard from Anne Marie."

His lips parted in denial. Then he saw the picture, started slightly, and lapsed into a sullen silence.

"You have had a letter from her," pursued Kathrien. "You burned it. And you tore that picture so that we would not recognise it. Why did you tell Marta that you had had no message —no news? You told her so, *since* that letter and photograph came. You went to Anne

Marie's home, too. Why did you tell me you had never seen her since she left here? Why did you lie to me? *Why do you hate her child?"*

Frederik made one dogged effort to regain what he had so bewilderingly lost.

"Are—are you going to believe what that brat says?" he muttered.

"No," retorted Kathrien. "But I'm going to find out for myself. I am going to find out where Anne Marie is before I marry you. And I am going to learn the truth from her. Willem may be right or wrong in what he thinks he remembers. But *I* am going to find out, past all doubt, what Anne Marie was to you. And, if what I think is true——"

"It is true," interposed McPherson. "It is true, Kathrien. I believe we got that message direct."

"Andrew is right, Katje," prompted the Dead Man. "Believe him."

"Yes!" cried Kathrien, as if in reply. "It is true. I believe Oom Peter was in this room to-night!"

"What?" blurted Frederik. "*You* saw him, too?"

His unguarded query was lost in Mrs. Batholommey's gasp of:

"Oh, Kathrien, that's quite impossible. It was only a coincidence that——"

"I don't care what any one else may think," rushed on Kathrien, swept along upon the wave of a strange exultation that bore her far out of her wonted timid self. "People have the right to think for themselves. I believe Oom Peter has been here, to-night!"

"I *am* here, Katje," breathed the Dead Man.

"I believe he is here, *now!*" declared Kathrien, her eyes aglow, and her face flushed. "He is here. Oh, Oom Peter!" she cried, her arms stretched wide in appeal, her face alight, her voice rising like that of a prophetess of old. "Oom Peter, if you can hear me now, give me back my promise! Give it back to me—*or I'll take it back!*"

"I did give it back to you, dear," answered Peter Grimm happily. "But, oh, what a time I've had putting it across!"

CHAPTER XVII

MR. BATHOLOMMEY TESTIFIES

To Whom It May Concern:

I am Henry Batholommey, rector of the Protestant Episcopal church at Grimm Manor, New York State. My neighbour, Andrew McPherson, M.D., has asked me to substantiate, so far as lies in my power, certain statements in a paper he is preparing for the Society of Psychical Research, concerning certain recent happenings in the house of my former parishioner, the late Peter Grimm of this place.

I refuse.

I understand, also, that in telling the story broadcast, as he has done, he has made free use of my name and that of my wife, as witnesses to these happenings. Wherefore, I am daily in receipt of fully a dozen letters of enquiry. Reporters, so-called scientists, mystics with long hair and unclean nails, and cranks and practical jokers of every sort and description have taken to calling at the rectory, at inconvenient hours, to cross-question me.

For example: one disreputable man, reeking of cheap liquor, came to me yesterday with the information that the story of Peter Grimm's return had converted him and that (with some slight temporary financial assistance from me) he was prepared to renounce liquor and mend his ways. He looked like a penitent. He talked like a penitent. But he most assuredly did not *smell* like a penitent. And I sent him about his business.

This was but one of many irritating interruptions upon my parish work to which Dr. McPherson's use of my name has subjected me.

In view of all this, I deem it advisable to save myself from further annoyance and to stop the rumour that a minister of the Gospel has turned Spiritualist, by issuing the following brief statement:

Dr. McPherson is desirous that my wife and myself endorse his belief that the occurrences at the home of the late Peter Grimm were of a supernatural nature.

We shall do no such thing.

For the single reason that neither Mrs. Batholommey nor myself, after mature reflection and dispassionate discussion, can find one atom of the Supernatural in any of the events that transpired

there. Perhaps I can best make clear my point of view by rehearsing the case and my own very small connection therewith.

The fact that Dr. McPherson is of a different denomination from myself in no way biases my feelings in this case. I am an Episcopalian. And I am of liberal views toward those who are not;—with the possible exception of Baptists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Methodists, and members of a few other denominations outside the direct Apostolic Succession. Yet I confess I was shocked at the conversion (or perversion) of my old neighbour, McPherson, to a cult which, for want of a better word, I must designate as "Spiritualism."

He told me of a compact he had made with my dear friend and parishioner, Peter Grimm, to the effect that whichever of them should first leave this mortal life was to return and make known his presence to the other. I told McPherson to his face that I regarded such a compact as being even more sacrilegious than senseless. My good wife echoed my sentiments. McPherson, who has not the admirable control over his temper so needful to a medical man, chose to become angry at my outspoken opinion and said several cruelly unjust

things concerning my own behaviour toward the late Peter Grimm.

I shall not stoop to denying or even repeating what he said; far less to justify myself. Yet I should like to mention, in passing, that his coarse gibe concerning my fawning on a rich man is the most unjust of all his abominable assertions.

I was in the habit of bringing cases of need before Peter Grimm's notice, it is true. And he responded right generously to every such appeal. I enlisted his financial aid for the local poor, for the Church Building Fund, for missions (home and foreign), and for the other worthy and needy cases.

But for myself or for my family I have never asked for one penny, either from Peter Grimm or from any other man. And as the gifts I have begged were in my Master's name and solely for my Master's service, I do not consider I have demeaned myself. Be that my sole defence. I am content with it.

The public, of late years, has looked askance at the attitude of clergymen toward the wealthier members of their congregation. And, in ninety-nine instances out of a hundred, with absolutely no cause. The Church is in need. The poor

are in dire distress. Missions languish for the few paltry thousands that would carry the Word triumphant throughout the earth.

Who is to supply these needs? Who but the clergyman? Out of his own scanty salary? That hardly supports him and his. Yet, in proportion, he gives from it as never did a multimillionaire. To whom can he turn for financial help in carrying out his Master's work? To the Rich Man. And, in many cases, the day is past when he can do so without first winning the personal liking of that same rich man. Yes, and often by flattering him and smiling approvingly at his vulgar humour or soothing his equally vulgar rages.

Shame that the deathless Church of God should have been brought to such a pass!

Yes, and tenfold shame to those that sneer at the clergyman who sacrifices and tortures all that is sensitive and sacred in himself, in the effort to wheedle from the wealthy boor the money to save God's poor and God's souls! Is it pleasant for him to fawn and to be patronised? Others do it, I know. But for *themselves*. The clergyman must do it in his Master's name and for no personal gain.

Let the rector refuse to lower himself thus—

What happens? The rich man goes to a church where flattery and subservience are more plentiful. The stiff-necked rector seeks in vain for funds. For lack of money his church runs down. It cannot keep up its charities and its other work.

Who is to blame? The rector, of course. Let us get an up-to-date man in his place. And the clergyman who refused to cringe finds himself not only without a church but with a record that bars him from getting another one. I do not say this state of affairs is universal. But I *do* say, from bitter experience, that it is far too prevalent. Forgive my digression. I will get back to my statement with all speed.

I have told of the "compact" between Peter Grimm and Andrew McPherson. Mr. Grimm died. Kathrien had promised him to marry his nephew, Frederik. She did not love him. She did love James Hartmann. She has admitted both those facts to me.

As the time for the wedding drew near, she was more and more loath to carry out her promise. McPherson attributes that distaste to the spiritual promptings of Peter Grimm. Can any normal woman (who has been forced to marry one man

while loving another) see the remotest hint of the Supernatural in it? No!

Willem, a boy of epileptic tendencies—as McPherson himself admits—had taken his benefactor's death terribly to heart, and had brooded over it day and night. Is there any reason to doubt that in such an unbalanced nature, this brooding, coupled by fever, should have produced a delirium in which he believed he heard Peter Grimm speaking to him?

He also believed, Kathrien tells me, that he heard the circus parade pass the house ten days after it had left town. Is one belief entitled to greater credence than the other? Or did the ghost of a circus parade meander through our Main street at night, accompanied by a Spook brass band? Each idea is quite as probable as the other.

And, from the boy's own statement, Peter Grimm said to him nothing original or even betokening a mind more developed than a child's. Willem knew Kathrien was going to marry Frederik. He knew she did not want to and that he himself disliked and feared Frederik. What more likely than that he should imagine he heard Peter forbid the match?

What more likely, in his own fevered unhappiness, than that he should think Peter Grimm said "I am very unhappy"? Would a man of Peter Grimm's strength and shrewdness come back to earth and tell the child nothing of greater importance than Willem says he told? And, if he could make Willem understand such phrases as "I am very unhappy" and "Kathrien must not marry Frederik," could he not have made the boy understand anything else?

As to Frederik Grimm:—Frederik, we know, was nervous and overwrought. His uncle's death had been a shock—if not a grief. He had the added worry of knowing Kathrien did not really love him. He was in constant fear lest Anne Marie, on hearing of Peter's death, might communicate with her mother and lest the secret of his own relations with the poor girl be exposed. This suspense added to his nervousness.

The sight of her picture and the reading of her pathetic letter stirred his conscience. He forced himself to destroy both bits of evidence. And the action strongly brought before his nerve-racked senses the thought of what honourable old Peter Grimm would have said of such conduct. So strongly, in fact, that in the dark he fancied

he saw Grimm's eyes glaring at him. The phenomenon is by no means uncommon and has been explained by scientists upon perfectly natural grounds.

As to Willem's sudden remembrance of half-forgotten facts concerning his own childhood, there is no parent living who cannot cite instances of newly awakened memory, in his or her own child, that are quite as remarkable. The seeing of his mother's photograph brought before Willem the recollection of scenes in which she had played a part; scenes that had been crowded from his mind by later events.

Frederik had just spoken harshly to him. And that recalled harsh words Frederik had spoken to the woman in the picture. And thus, quite simply, his memory supplied the one needful link. What is remarkable in all the foregoing? In fact, Shakespeare's Horatio says:

"There needs no ghost, my lord, come from the grave, to tell us this!"

So much for Dr. McPherson's efforts to surround a series of normal occurrences with a halo of the Supernatural! Now, let me add a word on my own account, and I am done.

The Dead do not return to the scene of their toil and pain and tears. Would a freed convict sneak back to his prison house or the ex-galley slave to his oar? The convalescent does not crawl into the contagion ward again of his free choice. Nor, I believe, would the Lord permit the return of the Dead; even to bear a warning to those left behind.

Glance at the sixteenth chapter of St. Luke for confirmation of my belief;—at the parable of the "certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day"; and who, in torment, after death, called to Abraham to send Lazarus from Heaven to visit the Tortured One's five brethren:

"That he may testify unto men, lest they also come into this place of torment.'

"Abraham said to him: 'They have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them.'

"And he said: 'Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead they would repent.'

"And he said unto him: 'If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded through one rise from the dead.'"

No, the whole idea is preposterous. It is far

outside of God's justice and infinitely farther beyond His boundless mercy.

"He giveth His Beloved *sleep*";—not weary, hopeless wanderings upon the face of the earth.

Peter Grimm did not return. And this is the only comment I care to make upon Andrew McPherson's amazing theory.

CHAPTER XVIII

DR. McPHERSON'S STATEMENT

DR. JAMES HYSLOP.

My Dear Sir:—After reading the account which I am mailing to you under separate cover, will you kindly forward it to the American Branch of the Society of Psychical Research? As you will observe, it is a verbatim report of a "séance."

For your personal information, I beg to make the following supplementary statement.

At the residence of Peter Grimm,—I should say the *late* Peter Grimm—(the well-known horticulturist of Grimm Manor, N. Y.) certain phenomena occurred this evening which would clearly indicate the Return of Peter Grimm, ten days after his decease. At my first free moment after the manifestation, I jotted down in shorthand the exact dialogue, etc., which I have since transcribed into the enclosed report.

While Peter Grimm was invisible to all, three people were present besides myself; including the "recipient," a child of eight, who had been ill, but was almost normal at the time.

No spelling out of signals nor automatic writing was employed, but word of mouth.

I made a compact with Peter Grimm while he was in the flesh that whichever one of us should go first was to return and give the other some sign. And I propose, by the enclosed report, to show positive proof that Peter Grimm kept his compact and that I assisted in the carrying out of his instructions.

Let me introduce myself and briefly recount the circumstances which led up to the séance, as well as my own state of mind concerning manifestations:

I am a practising physician in the town of Grimm Manor, a suburb of New York City, settled at the time of the Dutch occupation of Manhattan, and named after the family, the Grimms, which first owned the farm that is now the town site.

I have always been greatly interested in Spiritualism. I have read nearly all that has been written on this subject and have known, personally, most all the so-called mediums. I have attended séances in this country and abroad and have by turns been convinced that they were genuine or frauds.

Up to the time when the events which I am about to narrate began to occur, I had been unable to come to a definite decision, as far as my own belief was concerned, as to whether or not the spirits of the dead could communicate with the living. At one time I would be led to believe they could, but then the exposure of some well-known medium as a trickster would change my opinion and I would again find myself puzzling vainly over the answer to this problem.

You doubtless remember the furore which was created in Spiritualistic circles by the announcement of an English physician that, in accordance with a compact, a friend had communicated with him after death.

This idea fascinated me. There is an old Japanese myth to the effect that if a dying man resolves to do a certain act the body will, after death, perform that act. It seemed to me that if a man could die and return to earth in spirit it must be as the result of a resolution to return made just before death and constituting the ruling passion at the time of death itself. I determined that I would put this theory to the test.

We of this materialistic world of barter and sale give little time to the consideration of the

Hereafter. There are occasions with most of us when the unanswerable Why and Whence obtrudes itself on our vision, but it is a fleeting impression which vanishes with the rising of the sun on the day's work. The wonder and mystery of life may come home to us at the birth of a child or the death of a loved one, but we soon cease to marvel at the miracle of the former and a new joy banishes grief.

For, we say, what avails it, this search after the Land of the Hereafter, if there be such a place? No one has ever come back to tell us that there is; or what it is and where. It is all a matter of conjecture in which we are following round the circle trod by man since the world began.

One man believes that there is a Hereafter, a spirit land in which the Soul, stripped of all evil, reaches a state of perfection and divine happiness which justifies the stupendous feat of the Creation and the travail of those who are bound to the treadmill of life.

Another believes, pointing for proof to the dead branches from which new leaves spring, that life is endless, and that the soul, leaving the worn-out shell, takes up its dwelling in another form. Another with scorn tells us that all life is a joke

and we are the butts of the cruel will of an Omnipotent power. And still another says:

"Any and all beliefs in this matter are good, for none can be proved. Let each believe that which gives him the most happiness, so long as it be noble and sweet and true."

And with this last I hold. So that if it bring peace and love and contentment into the heart of man, woman, or child to believe that the spirit of a loved one, who has solved the Problem mortal cannot solve, can return to earth and communicate by some sign or token with those who were its companions when it inhabited a human house, I say it is wrong to scoff and rail at this belief.

There has now come to me the proof that such a belief does bring peace and love and contentment, that it does cast out evil. With regard to the Psychological aspects of the circumstances which are related in the enclosed transcript, I express no opinion. I have never before had the feeling that a person dead so far as mortal existence was concerned was endeavouring to communicate with me. The debates and wrangles which go on continually between those who affirm and deny the possibility of spirit messages have always impressed me, but beyond a theory, I had

no knowledge as to the right or wrong of it. However, I was strongly inclined to believe.

The fact that on many occasions so-called rappings, table liftings, writings, and other supposed spirit manifestations have been shown to be the result of mere human trickery does not necessarily prove that such demonstrations may not be the efforts of an immortal soul to make its presence known.

I say this because I want it understood that I have not allowed any prejudice, favourable or otherwise, to creep into the report that I send herewith. I go no further than to say that if my report helps to prove that the spirit of one we have loved and revered can come back and bring peace and love and happiness to mortals who are in dire need, if it can banish blighting evil from their lives; then life, for all its burdens, is not lived in vain.

Among my dearest friends was Peter Grimm, direct descendant of the founders of the village, who still occupied the old Manor House and was engaged in horticulture. Grimm's tulips were known throughout the country and his business was a large one.

There lived with him Kathrien, whom he had

adopted at my suggestion (made at a time when he seemed to be getting morose and verging on becoming a recluse) that he needed a child in the house; Frederik, his nephew and heir; James Hartmann, his secretary, and Willem, the son of Anne Marie, the daughter of Marta, the housekeeper.

Anne Marie had left home in disgrace and had sent Willem to her mother after his father had deserted her. Who this man was had never been revealed, and the whereabouts of Anne Marie herself were unknown at the time I am writing of.

At those times when I leaned toward the conviction that communication between earth and spirit land was possible, I was prone to think that if it could be, it must be between a spirit and a mortal who in life typified in their affection for each other the highest type of pure love. If any mortal, I thought, could receive a spirit message, it must be one whose heart and soul are spotless, whose love is as that of a little child before it has grown to manhood and plucked at the leaves of the Tree of Knowledge.

In the day Kathrien entered his home there was born in Peter Grimm a great love for mankind,

but especially for children. Not but that he had always been kindly and charitable to those who deserved his aid, but where before his life had been given up to his business, to making the brown earth do his will, he now devoted his chief thought to making Kathrien happy. This love for children was increased when Willem came to him, and I think the most perfect affection that ever existed among three persons was that which these three bore to each other.

Peter came to me recently to be treated for a cold which, while severe, was not in itself dangerous. But in examining him I found that his heart was in such a condition that a strong emotion, such as intense joy, anger, or fear might cause instant death.

I determined, on discovering this, to ask him to enter into a compact with me that whichever of us should die first should, after death, communicate with the survivor. While I was not sure (although a strong bond of affection existed between us) that I was a person fitted to receive such a communication, I was convinced that either Kathrien or Willem would understand a message sent to me from the spirit land by Peter, and, if the thing were possible, that he, if he could not

reach me directly, would do so through one or the other of them.

I made the mistake of telling Colonel Lawton of Peter's condition. I might have known that he would tell his wife. She told Mrs. Batholommey, the wife of the rector.

When I suggested the compact to Peter Grimm, he pooh-poohed the whole idea, laughed at me, told me to get such nonsense out of my head.

But I stuck to it. I told him of the incident of the English doctor and his friend, of the great service that would be done to humanity and science if he or I could prove that signals could be exchanged between a land inhabited by the souls of the dead and this mortal earth. At last he consented.

The rector and his wife called after we had finished our argument, and Mrs. Batholommey as much as told Peter during the course of the conversation that he was doomed. Then poor little Willem blabbed the truth. He had overheard us discussing the matter. Peter reiterated that he would make the compact with me.

We shook hands on it, we sealed it with a touch of our glasses filled with Peter Grimm's famous plum brandy.

There was a circus in town, one of those travelling country affairs, and the parade had passed by the house. Peter gave Willem money to buy tickets.

That was the last I saw or heard in this life of mortal Peter Grimm, standing there with a smile on his face.

I had been absent but a few minutes when I heard Kathrien crying my name. I ran back to the house. Peter Grimm was dead.

Ten days later came the séance described in my enclosure. Later in the evening I went to Willem's room and had a quiet little talk with him. He was calm again and spoke freely of what seemed to him an utterly natural experience. And from that conversation I believe I confirmed still further what was already established as a fact, so far as I was concerned. Peter Grimm had kept his compact with me. He had returned!

I wanted to talk with Willem at a time when he was in a normal condition and not in the thrall of fear. I found him without fever, though weaker than he had been for several days. I assured him that he had nothing to fear from Frederik, that all of us were his friends, and that no harm could come to him.

"Now tell me, Willem," I said, "all about your seeing Uncle Peter this evening."

"I awoke very thirsty and went downstairs for a drink," the boy told me in effect. "The ice pitcher felt so cool that I rested my cheek against it and then I drank some more water. Then I heard some one calling me.

"'Willem, Willem,' a voice said, 'can you hear me? Is there no one in this house that can hear me?'

"I couldn't make out at first who it was. Then I heard it again:

"'Willem, Willem,' it said, 'you *must* hear me.'

"Then I looked around and saw Mynheer Peter's hat on the rack, and I knew he must have come back. But I couldn't see him.

"'Where are you, Mynheer Peter?' I asked him.

"'You cannot see me, Willem, but I am here. I want you to tell them all I am here.'

"That's as near as I can remember it. We talked a while longer. Then he said something like:

"'Go over and look on the table, Willem.'

"I went to the table and saw some torn pieces of paper.

"'Put them together, Willem,' said Mynheer Grimm.

"When I had got it all pasted together I saw it was my mother, Anne Marie; and then you and Miss Kathrien came down.

"Uncle Peter was standing over there about in the middle of the room. I could tell from his voice, but I couldn't see him.

"'Tell them about the man who made Anne Marie cry,' Mynheer Peter told me. And he kept saying, 'Hurry, Willem, before it is too late; he is coming. Hurry, Willem, hurry,' and just before Mr. Frederik came in Mynheer Peter said, 'Tell them now, Willem; *he* is listening at the door.'

"Before you came down I asked Mynheer Peter to take me back with him when he went and he said he would."

Now, mind you, Willem knew nothing of the compact Peter and I had made.

Peter Grimm had said he would return, if he could. I believe he did so.

My studies of the so-called "Occult" have done my reputation in this narrow provincial town much

harm. I have been sneered at as a "spiritualist," a "spook hunter," an "agnostic." I am none of the three. I am a seeker after Truth; even while fully aware of the impossibility of absolutely finding that elusive quality. Nor do my researches in any way conflict with revealed religion, nor in the simple Bible faith that has ever been mine and that shall forever sustain me.

Having thus set forth my personal position in the matter—perhaps tediously and to an undue length,—I beg to call your attention to my report.

Very truly yours,

ANDREW MCPHERSON, M.D.

CHAPTER XIX

BACK TO THE STORY

DR. MCPHERSON occasionally gave a vigorous shake to his fountain pen, and made corrections here and there.

It was nearly midnight, and he had been writing almost uninterruptedly since he had followed Willem upstairs after the boy's flight.

Willem had been restless and feverish, and had asked repeatedly to be brought down to the living-room. He seemed irresistibly drawn toward the place where he had talked with Peter Grimm and had "almost seen him."

So the sofa had been drawn up to the fire and a bed made for him there. Now, however, he was at last sleeping peacefully in his little upstairs room, and the whole house was quiet, though no one else had gone to bed, and there was everywhere a subdued feeling of excitement.

The doctor had drawn a little table close to the vacant side of the fireplace (for the coals still smouldered, and the night was damp and chill).

He had placed Willem's medicines there; and a lamp, the only bright spot in the big room.

Outside, the world was bathed in moonlight, and through the window the arms of the windmill could be seen, waving solemnly round and round like some strange, black mysterious creature beckoning silently from another world.

McPherson was preparing a formal statement of the "séance" while it was still fresh in his mind. And as Willem might need him, he was filling in a waiting hour by writing.

Mrs. Batholommey's anxious face, encased in a scarf, broke in upon his concentration.

"Oh—I'm *so* nervous!" exclaimed the rector's wife, shudderingly, as she came into the room and going to the piano, turned up the second lamp.

"How can you sit here in such a dim light, after all that has happened in this room—just a few hours ago, too?"

Dr. McPherson, intent upon his work, was determined not to be interrupted. His only reply to Mrs. Batholommey was the scratching of his pen and the rattle of paper as he turned over a page.

"I thought perhaps Frederik had come back," she went on.

"So Willem's feeling better again?" she asked, advancing on the doctor.

"Yes," he answered abstractedly. "I took him upstairs a few minutes ago."

"Strange how the boy wants to remain in this room!" said Mrs. Batholommey.

"M'm——" grunted Dr. McPherson shortly, without looking up at all.

Mrs. Batholommey came nearer and sat down.

"Oh, Doctor! Doctor!" she cried. "The scene that took place here to-night has completely upset me."

The doctor's only reply was to turn his back on Mrs. Batholommey and begin reading his manuscript aloud in an undertone, scratching out a word here, adding something there.

Mrs. Batholommey, quite unconscious that she was a nuisance, leaned back in her chair and let her words flow on.

"Well, Doctor, the breaking off of the engagement is—er—sudden, isn't it? We've been talking it over in the front parlour, Mr. Batholommey and I."

The doctor darted a withering look at her over his spectacles.

"I suggest sending out a card——" she purred,

"just a neat card" (here she measured off an imaginary card with her fingers), "saying that owing to the bereavement in the family the wedding has been indefinitely postponed. Of course," she sighed, "it isn't exactly true."

"Won't take place at all," exploded the doctor, going on at once with his reading.

"Evidently not," said Mrs. Batholommey, "but if the whole matter looks very strange to *me*—How is it going to look to other people—especially when we haven't any—any *rational* explanation—as yet? We must get out of it in *some* fashion. I'm sure I don't know how else we can explain—I don't like telling anything that isn't true—but—there *was* to be a wedding." Mrs. Batholommey waved her right hand. "There *isn't* to be any wedding," she waved her left hand. "At least, Frederik isn't to be in it—and one must account for it *somehow?*"

"Whose business is it?" fired the doctor, in a voice that made Mrs. Batholommey start like a frightened rabbit.

For one moment his eyes peered fiercely at her under their shaggy brows, and then he returned to his narrative.

"Nobody's at all," she made great haste to

say. "Nobody's at all—nobody's at all, of course. But Kathrien's position is certainly unusual; and the strangest part of it is—she doesn't appear to feel her situation. She's sitting alone in the library seemingly placid and happy. She acts as if a weight were off her mind. But the main point I've been arguing is this: Should the card we're going to send out have a narrow black border, or not?"

She turned toward the doctor and indicated with her fingers the width of black border that seemed to her to fit the occasion. But her trouble was entirely wasted.

Dr. McPherson was once more engrossed in his writing, and had forgotten her existence.

"Well, Doctor," she said in an injured tone, "you don't appear to be interested. You don't even answer!"

"I couldn't," snapped Dr. McPherson. "I didn't know whether you were talking *again* or *still.*"

Mrs. Batholommey was hurt, and she showed it in the reproachful look she cast at the doctor's unassailable, uninterested back.

"Oh, of course," she said, "all these little matters sound trivial to you. But men like you

couldn't look after the workings of the *next* world, if other people didn't attend to *this one. Somebody* has to do it," she ended triumphantly.

"I fully appreciate the fact, Mistress Batholommey, that other people are making it possible for me to be *myself*——"

Here the conversation was interrupted by a couple of raps on the window pane.

"What's that?" cried Mrs. Batholommey, jumping up in alarm.

"Telegram for Frederik Grimm," came a voice from the darkness, and a form was silhouetted against the moonlight.

"Mr. Grimm's down at the hotel," said Mrs. Batholommey, hastily throwing up the window, "but I'll sign for it. Where do I sign?" she fluttered. "Oh, yes, I see, *here!*"

She wrote Frederik's name, then handed back the book to the telegraph boy, and closed the window. Just as she laid the telegram on the desk, Mr. Batholommey came into the room.

"Well, Doctor," he said with veiled sarcasm, "I would by all means suggest that we don't judge Frederik until the information Willem has *volunteered* can be verified."

"Umph!" grunted the doctor.

Then he got up and went to the telephone.

"Four—red," he called to "Central."

Mr. Batholommey betook himself to the vestibule and began to put on his rubbers with methodical care.

"However, I regret" (he went on as easily as if the doctor had not grunted) "that Frederik has left the house without offering some sort of explanation."

"Four—red?" pursued the doctor. "That you, Marget? I'm at Peter's. I mean—I'm at the Grimms'. No, don't wait up for me. Send me my bag here. I'll stay the night with Willem. Bye."

He put up the receiver and began to collect his scattered papers.

"Good-night, Doctor," said the clergyman. "Good-night, Rose."

He started toward the door, but the doctor called him back.

"Hold on, Mr. Batholommey!" he interposed. "I'm writing an account of all that's happened here to-night—from the very beginning. I've an idea it's going to make a stir. It's just the sort of thing the Society has been after——"

"Indeed!" said Mr. Batholommey in a doubtful tone.

"When I have verified every word of the evidence by Willem's mother——"

Here the Rev. Mr. Batholommey smiled behind his hand in a decidedly secular way.

"——I shall send in my report," continued the doctor. "Would you have any objection to the name of Mrs. Batholommey being used as a witness?"

Mr. Batholommey hesitated. His usually placid eyes were full of perplexity.

"Well—Doctor—I—I——"

But Mrs. Batholommey, unlike her temporising husband, did not hesitate. She rushed into the conversation all unasked.

"Oh, no, you don't!" she cried. "You may flout *our* beliefs,—but wouldn't you like to bolster up your report with an endorsement by the wife of a clergyman! It sounds so respectable and sane, doesn't it? No, sir! You can't prop up your wild-eyed theories against the good black of *one* minister's coat. Not by any means! I think myself that you have probably stumbled on the truth about Willem's mother; but that doesn't prove there's anything in all your notions, for

that child knew the truth all along. He's eight years old and he was with her until he was five;—and five's the age of memory. He's a precocious boy, besides. Every incident of his mother's life lingered in his little mind. Suppose you prove by her that it's all true?—Still, *Willem remembered!* And that's all there is to it."

Confident that she had made a good point, Mrs. Batholommey gave her head a toss and left the field, or to be more exact, went out to get her husband's umbrella.

Mr. Batholommey felt that after this display of colours on the part of his consort, he must needs testify also.

"Don't you think, Doctor,—(mind, I'm not opposing your ideas. I'm just echoing just what everybody else thinks)—don't you believe these ideas are leading away from the heaven we were taught to believe in; that they tend toward irresponsibility—toward eccentricity? Is it healthy—that's the idea. Is it—*healthy?*"

Dr. McPherson shook himself like a shaggy dog.

"Well, Batholommey," he said, "religion has frequently led to the stake, and I never heard the Spanish Inquisition called *healthy* for anybody

taking part in it. Still, religion flourishes. But your old-fashioned, unscientific, gilt, gingerbread idea of heaven blew up ten years ago—went out. *My* heaven's just coming in. It's new. Dr. Funk and a lot of clergymen are in already. You'd better get used to it, Batholommey, and join in the procession."

Having delivered this ultimatum the doctor became oblivious to the existence of the Batholommey family and gave his whole attention once more to his writing.

"H'm!" said Mr. Batholommey tolerantly. "When you can convince *me!*" (He lapsed into Dutch.) "Well, *tou roustin,* Doctor."

The clergyman started for the door, but his dutiful wife was there before him, his umbrella in her hand.

"Good-night, Henry," she said, beaming affectionately on him. "I'll be home to-morrow."

Then with a most coquettish glance, she purred coyly:

"You'll be glad to see me, dear, *won't* you?"

Mr. Batholommey beamed in his turn, and patted her on the cheek.

"Yes, my church mouse!" he said as he kissed her good-bye and went out into the night.

Mrs. Batholommey closed the doors after him, but immediately opened them a trifle and peered through the crack.

"Look out, Henry, for the trolley cars," she cried. "It's dark out there—And be careful you don't step into a mud puddle! They must be as deep as mill ponds after this rain, and there aren't half enough street lamps in this neighbourhood—you'll be in over your ankles before you know it!"

"All right!" came in a diminuendo from the clergyman's receding form. "I'll be careful. Don't stand there taking cold. Good-night!"

"Woman," thundered Dr. McPherson in a terrible voice, "*close that door!* Do you want my lamp to blow clean out? How can a body write with such goings-on in his ears? St. Paul was a wise man. 'Let the woman learn in silence,' he said, 'with all subjection.' Will you be good enough to heed that, and let me write in peace?"

Mrs. Batholommey fastened the door with elaborate and most deliberate care; then, as she passed the doctor's table on her way to the front parlour, she fired a parting shot.

"Write as much as you like, Doctor," she said loftily. "Words are but air. *You* know and *I*

know and *everybody* knows that seeing is believing."

"Damn everybody!" growled the doctor, frowning at the lady's retreating figure. "It's 'everybody's' ignorance that's set the world back five hundred years. Where was I, before?" he said to himself. "Oh! Yes."

And he went back to his Statement.

CHAPTER XX

THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

FREDERIK came impatiently up the home walk. The old house was bathed in moonlight; the walk itself leading up to it was sweet with the scent of wet flowers. The whole place carried a peaceful air, as if a blessing rested upon it. But Frederik heeded nothing—saw none of the beauty and mystery. His mind was filled with quite different things.

He had waited for hours at the hotel, expecting Hicks or his lawyer. When no one arrived at the hour agreed upon, Frederik felt a bit uneasy, but he tried to persuade himself that Hicks had merely missed the train and would come on the next one. With growing apprehension he waited, smoking innumerable cigarettes while the evening wore on, till finally the last train had come and gone. There was nothing to do but go back to the house, and face the *other* matter. And he dreaded it! Oh, how he dreaded it!

He could not bear the thought of Kathrien's eyes that had first doubted, then accused, then

condemned him. All the while he had waited at the hotel, he had remembered those eyes. If he had not loved her sincerely the situation would have been comparatively easy for him; he could simply have cleared out—spent the rest of his days in Europe, if necessary, so that he might never see or hear of any one connected with Grimm Manor again in all his life.

But Kathrien! Who could have been near her and *ever* forget her? The turn of her head, the absolute sweetness of her—the sunshine she radiated, made it utterly impossible for one to think of forgetting—of living all one's long life without her. Frederik threw away his cigarette and lighted another as he stood outside the windows of the house and looked in.

Oom Peter was there—how could he go in then? Common sense told him that he had been smoking too much and his nerves had gone bad—that he had become an old woman with his fears and tremblings; yet—he knew Oom Peter was there—Well (he shrugged his shoulders), about all the harm that could be done *had* been done, and he had the money now, anyway, so he might as well go in and find out the present state of affairs. There might be, there ought to be, some word

from Hicks by this time. With tight-shut lips, he walked quickly up the "stoop" steps and into the house.

As he came into the living-room he glanced at the doctor, who, with bulky form crouched over the little table, was still busily writing and heard nothing.

Frederik half-unconsciously looked toward Kathrien's room, then removed his silk hat with its mourning band, and his black gloves, and laid them with his cane on the hall table.

Then he turned toward Dr. McPherson.

"Good-evening, Doctor," he said shortly. "Any of them come to their senses yet?"

There was a defiant ring in the last sentence, though he knew in his heart that his cause was lost.

The doctor looked up long enough to say:

"Oh, Frederik, you're back again, are you?" then went on with his writing.

Frederik glanced furtively around the shadowy room, and then lighted some candles in an effort to make the place more cheerful. Suddenly his eye was riveted on the telegram resting conspicuously on his uncle's desk. On the very spot, so

it happened, where he had burned Anne Marie's letter. He put down his cigarette quickly.

"Is that telegram for me?" he asked in an eager tone.

"Yes," snorted Dr. McPherson.

"Oh——" Frederik said. "It will explain perhaps why I—I've been kept waiting at the hotel—I had an appointment to meet a man who wanted to buy this business."

"Ha!" The doctor grunted indignantly.

Frederik cleared his throat.

"I may as well tell you—I'm thinking of selling out root and branch."

At this amazing news the doctor got up slowly, and turning his bushy head toward Frederik, fixed his keen eyes upon him. He was all attention now.

"Yes——?"

Then with a sheepish laugh Frederik abruptly changed the subject.

"You'll think it strange," he said, "but I simply cannot make up my mind to go near the old desk of my uncle's—peculiar, yes—isn't it?"

He smiled rather a sickly smile at the doctor, and hesitated.

"I've got a perfect—Ha! Ha!—terror of the thing!"

His laughter was quite mirthless and his fear made him a pitiable object.

The doctor, not trying to hide his contempt for him, went to the desk, took the telegram, and threw it in Frederik's direction, not even troubling to aim accurately.

It hit the floor about two feet away from the younger man's trimly shod feet, and he quickly reached over sideways and seized it. He tore it open. Then, as his eyes took in the message it contained, he drew a long breath.

He sat down mechanically, looking straight ahead of him.

"Billy Hicks," he said slowly in a dazed voice, "Billy Hicks, the man I was to sell out to, is de—I knew it—This afternoon when he phoned—something told me—but I wouldn't believe it."

Slowly he put the telegram in its envelope, and then put the envelope into his pocket; but the dazed look never left his eyes, and his face was grey white.

"Doctor," he said, turning his eyes at last, "as sure as you live, somebody else is doing my thinking for me in this house."

Dr. McPherson's heavy eyebrows met in an earnest frown as he studied Frederik.

"What?" he queried.

"To-night—here in this room," Frederik went on in a voice full of awe, "I thought I saw my uncle *there*——"

He pointed toward the desk with a little shudder.

"Eh?" said the doctor, with popping eyes, coming a step nearer. "You really mean that you thought you saw *Peter Grimm?*"

"And just before I—I saw him—I—I—had the strangest impulse to go to the foot of the stairs and call Kitty—give her the house—and run—run—get out."

"Oh!" cried the doctor sarcastically. "A good impulse. I see! Some one else *must* have been thinking for you—certainly."

"When I wouldn't do it," the scared voice went on, "I thought he gave me a terrible look." He covered his eyes with his hand. "A *terrible* look."

"Your uncle?" demanded Dr. McPherson.

"Yes," breathed Frederik. "*Och!* God! I won't forget *that* look!" he cried excitedly, uncovering his eyes again. "And as I started from

the room—he blotted out—I mean I saw him blot out—Then I left the photograph on the desk, and——"

"Ah!" exclaimed the doctor triumphantly. "That's how Willem came by it. Had you never had this impulse before—to give up Kathrien—to let her have the cottage?"

"*Not much*—I hadn't!" said Frederik decidedly, walking back and forth a moment.

Then, looking toward the desk, he reached out his hand until it touched the back of a chair beside it, and, giving the chair a quick pull out of what was evidently to him a danger zone, he sat down.

"I told you some one else was *thinking* for me," he said. "I don't want to give her up. I love her." (His eyes went dark.) "But if she's going to turn against me for—well, I'm not going to sit *here* and cry about it. But I'll tell you one thing: from this time I propose to think for myself. I've done with this house," he cried, getting up. "I'd like to sell it along with the rest and let a stranger"—he flung the chair recklessly against the desk—"raze it to the ground.

"When I walk out of here to-night she can have it."

He looked thoughtfully at the desk a moment.

"Oh, I wouldn't sleep here—I give her the house because—well, I——"

"You want to be on the safe side in case he *was* there!" scoffed Dr. McPherson.

Frederik dropped his voice almost to a whisper, and there was perplexity in it as well as awe.

"How do you account for it anyway, Doctor?" he asked.

Instead of answering, the doctor asked another question.

"Frederik," he said, "when did you see Anne Marie last?"

"Now," said Frederik disagreeably, "I'm not answering questions."

"I think it only fair to tell you," said Dr. McPherson, "that it won't matter a damn whether you answer me or not. Don't fret yourself that I'm not going to find her. This has come home to me. I'm off to the city to-morrow. I'll have the truth from her; if I have to call in the police to trace her."

Frederik looked drearily at the doctor, then took up his gloves and began to put them on. After a pause he said dully, mechanically:

"Oh, I saw her about three years ago."

"Never since?" probed the doctor.

"No."

"What occurred the last time you saw her?"

"Oh," said Frederik lifelessly. "What *always* occurs when a young man realises that he has his life before him—and that he must be respected, must think of his future?"

"A scene took place, eh?"

"Yes," Frederik agreed laconically.

"Was Willem present?" went on the interrogation.

"Yes, she held him in her arms."

"And then—what happened?" the doctor insisted.

Frederik dropped his eyes.

"Oh," he said, "then I left the house."

He found his hat and cane as he spoke, and walked slowly toward the door.

"Then it's all true," cried Dr. McPherson in wonderment, staring abstractedly at the floor. He raised his head suddenly and looked with stern eyes at Frederik.

"What are you going to do for Willem?" he demanded.

"Well," temporised that noble soul, "I'm a rich man now—and if I recognise him—there

might be trouble. His mother's gone to the dogs anyway——"

He left the speech unfinished and turned his head away uncomfortably. He could not say such things and meet the doctor's scorching look.

"You damned young scoundrel!" bellowed McPherson in wrath. "Oh, what an act of charity if the good Lord took Willem!—And I say it with all my heart. Out of all you have—not a crumb for——"

"I want you to know that I've sweated for that money," Frederik turned on the doctor long enough to say. "I've sweated for it, and I'm going to keep it!"

"You *what?*" howled Dr. McPherson jeeringly.

"Yes," Frederik cried in the greatest excitement, all his calmness forsaking him utterly. "I've sweated for it! I went to jail for it. Every day I have been in this house has been spent in prison. I've been doing time. Do you think it didn't get on my nerves? What haven't I had to do! I've gone to bed at nine o'clock and lain there thinking how New York was just waking up at that time, and how miserably I was out of it all. Lord! I've got up at cock-crow to be

in time for grace at the breakfast table. Why, didn't I take a Sunday-school class to please him?

"Lord! Didn't I hand out the infernal cornucopias at the Church's silly old Christmas tree," he went on quickly, "while he played Santa Claus? What more can a fellow do to earn his money? Don't you call that sweating? No, sir! I've danced like a damned hand-organ monkey for the pennies he left me, and I had to grin and touch my hat and make believe I liked it. Now I'm going to spend every cent for my own personal pleasure."

Once more Frederik started to go.

"Will rich men never learn wisdom?" soliloquised Dr. McPherson as he began to prepare some medicine for Willem.

"No, they won't," Frederik flung back over his shoulder. "But in every fourth generation there comes along a *wise* fellow—a spender. Well, I'm the spender here."

He pulled out another cigarette, lighted it, and put on his hat.

"Shame on you!" cried the doctor indignantly. "Your breed ought to be exterminated!"

"Oh, no," Frederik declared. "We're as nec-

essary as you are. We're the real wealth distributors. I wish you good-night, Doctor."

And he was gone.

Disgust was still written all over the doctor's face as he measured the medicine carefully and emptied it into a glass of water. He picked up the candelabrum in his other hand, and was just starting toward the stairs and Willem's room when Kathrien came in.

"Kathrien!" he cried in a ringing voice. "Burn up your wedding dress! We've made no mistake. I can tell you that!"

A moment more and he climbed the stairs and had disappeared into Willem's room, leaving Kathrien motionless, her face lighted with happy serenity. Then she went softly to Oom Peter's worn old desk chair, and, standing behind it, put her arms around its sides lovingly, almost protectingly—quite as if its former owner were sitting there and could feel her gentle caress.

"Oom Peter," she whispered tenderly, and her dreamy eyes grew dreamier, "Oom Peter—I know I am doing what you would have me do."

CHAPTER XXI

"ONLY ONE THING REALLY COUNTS"

AND Peter Grimm, standing in the shadows, nodded happy assent to her cry. The Dead Man's ageless face was wondrous bright. It shone with a joy that made the rugged features beautiful.

His work was done. His long journey from the Unknown had not failed. The one deed of his mortal life that could have wrought ill was undone. He had atoned for a single fault and had seen the ill effects of that fault brought to nothing. He could go back with a calm mind. All was well in his earthly home.

But he was not yet wholly content. One task remained. A light task, and, to guess from his radiant face, a welcome one. And even now he was bringing to pass its completion. For his eyes turned from their loving scrutiny of Kathrien and rested on the outer door. And, as in response to an unspoken summons, footfalls were heard in the entry.

At the sound, Kathrien's drooping figure

straightened. And a glow came into her tired eyes. The outer door opened and James Hartmann came in. He took an impulsive step toward the girl. Then he remembered himself. Turning aside to the rack, he hung his coat and hat on it, and asked, as to a casual acquaintance:

"Have you seen Frederik anywhere? He told me hours ago that he'd join me in the office in a few minutes. I waited, but he didn't come. Then Marta told me he had gone down to the hotel. I went over to see father, and I stopped at the hotel on my way back. They said Frederik had been there, but that he had just gone. I'm rather tired of playing hide-and-seek with him. Has he come in yet?"

"He has come in. But I think he has gone again. And—and, James, I think he will not come here again."

"What? Then the wedding won't be at the house?"

"The wedding won't be—anywhere."

"Kathrien!"

He stared at her, seeking to read grief, humiliation, or, at the very least, the anger engendered of a lovers' quarrel. But her face was serene, even happy. The worry was gone that had lurked

behind her gentle eyes. The furrow had been smoothed from the low, white brow, and even the pathetic aura of sorrow that had clung to her as a garment since Peter Grimm's death had departed.

"Kathrien!" he repeated doubtfully, his heart thumping in an unruly fashion that well-nigh choked him.

The serene calm of the girl's face fled beneath his eager, troubled gaze.

"Frederik has gone," she said briefly. "I am not going to marry him. I broke our engagement this evening."

"And you are free—free to——?"

He checked himself, fearful to believe in the marvellous fortune that seemed to have come all at once from the Unattainable into his very grasp. And, girl-like, Kathrien was, of a sudden, panic stricken.

"It is late," she said hastily, "very late. Good-night!"

She made as though to go to her room. And James Hartmann, still full of that new fear of his own good fortune, dared not stay her.

But Peter Grimm did not hesitate.

"Katje!" pleaded the Dead Man. "Is Hap-

piness so common that we can toy with it? Is life's greatest joy so cheap that we can thrust it aside when by a miracle it is laid at our feet? Can we afford to risk everything by putting off love when it is in our very grasp?"

The girl hesitated, paused, and seemed to busy herself with straightening some disarranged articles on the desk. The Dead Man came and stood beside her.

"He loves you, Katje," he murmured. "And only one thing really counts—Love! It is the only thing that tells, in the long run. Nothing else endures to the end. Perhaps, if you are shy now and do not let him speak, he may find courage to speak to-morrow. But perhaps he may not. And are you willing to take that chance?"

"No!" cried the girl in quick fear. "No!"

"What?" asked Hartmann, startled by the frightened denial, so meaningless to him.

"I—I didn't know I spoke," she faltered, embarrassed. "It was foolish of me. I had some strange thought. And——"

"I don't understand."

"You understand less and less every minute, James," laughed Peter Grimm. "She loves you. Are you going to let her slip through your fingers

just because you haven't the courage to speak? You were brave enough early this evening when you didn't have a chance. Now that she's yours for the asking, why be tongue-tied? It was the fear of losing you that made her cry out 'No!' just now."

"Katje," demanded Hartmann, abashed at his own audacity, yet unable to keep back the words, "were you afraid I wouldn't be here in the morning to tell you I loved you? Was that why you said——?"

"How did you know?" she gasped appalled. "You read my mind."

Before she could realise the meaning of what she had said, she found herself whirled bodily from the floor and caught close in the grip of two strong arms that crushed her to a heaving breast. And Hartmann was raining kisses on her hair, her eyes, her upturned face.

"James!" she panted. "Don't! Put me down."

"Not till you say you love me," came the answer in a voice from whence all timidity had forever fled.

The tone of glad, adoring rulership thrilled her. She ceased her half-hearted struggles to free her-

self. Her arms, through no conscious effort of her own, crept upward until they encircled his neck.

"Say you love me!" he demanded again, in that glorious Mastery of the Loved.

"I love you," she answered obediently. "I have always loved you, I think. It's—it's very wonderful to be held like this and—and to be *glad* not to be let go. I—I—I don't really think I wanted you to let me go, even when I told you to."

"There is something else you must say before I let you go," he demanded, drunk with his new-born power and happiness.

"Yes? I'll say it."

"Say you will marry me to-morrow."

This time, from sheer amazement, she sprang back, out of the loosened clasp of his arms.

"To-morrow?" she gasped. "Are you crazy? Why," with a little shudder, "to-morrow was to be the day I was to——"

"To marry a man you didn't love. That would have made it forever a day of shame. You owe 'to-morrow' something to atone for that. Pay its debt by marrying *me* then."

"I—I can't," she protested. "What—what would people say?"

"Katje!" broke in the Dead Man. "When you shall have learned that 'what people say' is the most senseless bugbear in all this wide world of senseless bugbears, you will be far on the road to true greatness. You will have broken the heaviest, most galling, most idiotically *useless* fetter that weights down humanity. Being a woman you will never be able wholly to free yourself from that same fetter. But lift its weight from your soul just this once! You were going to curse your life with a blasphemously wicked, loveless marriage to-morrow. And the world would have approved. You have a chance to atone for an attempted wrong and to win happiness for yourself and the man you love, to-morrow, by marrying James then. A few representatives of the world will hold up their hands and squawk: 'How scandalously sudden! I suppose she did it to show she didn't mind Frederik's jilting her.' And for the sake of the people who would have approved a crime and who will sneer at a good and wise deed, you are going to throw away many days of bliss, and senselessly postpone the one perfect Event of your life. Is this my wise little girl or is it some one just as stubborn and foolish as her old uncle used to be? Tell me."

"Why should we care what 'people say'?" urged Hartmann as Kathrien hesitated. "The opinions of other people wreck lots of lives. Let's be great enough and wise enough to choose our own happiness! Don't let's be stubborn like poor old Mr. Grimm, and——"

"James!" she cried in wonder. "Those are just the very things I was thinking. That's the second time in a few minutes that you have read my mind."

"Perhaps it was *you* who were reading mine," said Hartmann. "That's what people call 'Telepathy,' isn't it?"

"Yes," smiled the Dead Man. "That is what 'people' call it—who know no better. Oh, what a jumble people do make of the simple things of the Universe!"

"Anyway," went on Hartmann, without waiting for Kathrien to reply to his question, "it doesn't matter which of us thought of it first. It's enough to know it's true. And you *will* marry me to-morrow?"

"*Yes!*" vociferated Peter Grimm.

"Y-yes," faltered the girl.

"Listen, dear," continued Hartmann, "we won't be very well off, I'm afraid. I've a little

money—but not much. I know scientific gardening as not many men know it. So we won't starve. But it won't be as if you were going to marry a rich man like Frederik Grimm."

"Thank Heaven, it won't!" she breathed fervently. "And do you suppose it will matter one bit to me that we won't be rich? I wish, of course, that we didn't have to leave this dear old house, but——"

"If we had both the house and the little capital that belongs to me," answered Hartmann, "we could stay on here and make a splendid living. But what's the use of building air castles?"

"Why not?" urged the Dead Man. "They're as cheap to build as air dungeons; and a million times pleasanter to live in. But, don't fret about the house. Frederik is going to turn it over to you—I've seen to that. And you will prosper, you two, here in the home I loved."

"I believe it will come out all right!" declared the girl. "I have a feeling that it will. Intuition if you like."

"'Intuition,'" repeated the Dead Man whimsically. "Yes. Call it that, if you choose. 'Intuition' and 'telepathy' are both pretty synonyms for the words spoken to you that mortal ears are

too gross to understand and whose sense sometimes finds vague resting-place in mortal brains."

"It will come out all right," she reiterated, smiling up at her lover.

"It's good to see you smile again," said Hartmann, once more drawing her close to him. "I'm glad your cloud of grief is beginning to lift."

"It *has* lifted," she returned. "When Oom Peter went away, and seemed utterly lost to me forever, I thought my heart would break. But now—now I know he *hasn't* gone. I know he has been here with me this very evening."

"I—I don't understand."

"It is true," she insisted. "You must believe it, dear. For it is very real to me. I believe he came back to set me free from my promise to Frederik. Some time—some time, I'll tell you all about it."

"In the meanwhile," adjured the Dead Man, "believe her, James. If men would put less faith in their own four-square logic and more faith in their wives' illogical beliefs, there'd be fewer mistakes made."

"Don't ask me any more about it to-night," begged the girl in response to the amazed questioning in her lover's eyes. "I can't speak of it

just yet. It's all too near—too wonderful."

"Just as you like," he agreed. "Now I must go, for I want to catch Mr. Batholommey before he goes to sleep, and make the arrangements with him for the wedding."

His arm around her, they crossed to where his hat and coat were hanging.

"I wonder if Oom Peter can see us now?" she mused, as Hartmann stooped to kiss her good-night.

"That's the great mystery of the ages," answered Hartmann. "Who can tell? But I wish he might know. I think, seen as he must see things now, he would be glad. Good-night, sweetheart."

She watched him stride down the walk. Then she came back into the room, her eyes alight.

"Oh, Oom Peter," she murmured, half aloud.

"I see," returned Peter Grimm. "I know all about it. I know, little girl. I know."

CHAPTER XXII

"ALL THAT HAPPENS, HAPPENS AGAIN"

LATE as was the hour, Kathrien yet lingered a few minutes longer in the room where that night her freedom and her life's crown had come to her.

She paused by the desk and lovingly caressed the rich, red mass of roses which, in memory of her uncle, she daily placed there. The cool, velvety touch of the blossoms was like a living response to her caress. And from the crimson petals arose a faint, drowsy fragrance.

Kathrien sank into the worn desk chair and gazed dreamily into the dying fire. She seemed to read there a wonderful story. Or else the grey-red embers shaped themselves into beautiful pictures. For her face was joyous beyond all belief.

"To-morrow!" she murmured to herself.

And Peter Grimm, looking down at her, smiled as he caught the whispered word.

"Yes, *lievling,*" he answered. "To-morrow. Isn't it a marvellous word? It holds all the hopes and fears of the whole world."

"I'm so happy! I'm so *happy!*" she breathed.

The Dead Man laid his hand gently on the soft lustre of her hair.

"Then, good-night to you, my darling," he said in the old tender voice that had comforted her childish griefs and shared her childish delights in the bygone days. "Good-night, my darling. Love can never say 'good-bye.' I am going, little girl. I am leaving you here in your dear home that shall always be yours. Here, in the years that are to come, the way will lie clear before you. May pleasure and peace go with you, little girl of mine."

Her eyes were luminous. There was a half-smile on her lips. Peter Grimm's own eyes reflected her smile as he stroked her hair and continued to look down into her rapt face as though to impress its every detail upon his memory.

"Here on sunny, blossoming days," he went on, "when you look out on my old gardens, as a happy wife, all the flowers and trees and shrubs shall bloom enchanted to your eyes. For, love gives a heaven-light to everything. And when the home we love is our own, it becomes doubly fair."

The light in her eyes grew brighter and he stooped to brush his lips to her forehead.

"All that happens, happens again," he went on in that same caressing voice as though loath to leave her, and seeking to prolong his stay at her side. "And when, as a mother, you explain each leaf and bud, and the miracle of the growing flowers to your own little people, you will sometimes think of the days when you and I walked through the gardens and the leafy lanes together, and how I taught you all those things —even as you shall be teaching your own children. Yes,—all that happens, happens again and has happened before. You will teach them, just as I taught you. And so I shall always linger in your heart. Here, in our home, everything will keep on reminding you of me. Not in sadness nor in gloom. But as a wonderful, golden memory. You will forget only the part of me that was stubborn and unreasonable and ill-tempered —and you will remember me only as I *wished* to be. That is one of the gifts of God to those who have left this world. Their dear ones remember them only as kind, as loving, as good. Their faults fade from the memory and the *good* ever glows more and more brightly."

He paused. And still he could not leave the

happy girl as she sat there in her blissful, fireside reverie.

"I shall be waiting for you, Katje," he said. "And I shall be knowing all of your life, its joys, its happy toil and its sweet rest, its lights and its passing shadows. I shall love your children with all my whole heart. And I shall be their grandfather just as though I were here. I shall be everywhere about you and yours, Katje. Always. In the stockings at Christmas, in the big, busy, teeming world of shadows, just outside your threshold; or whispering to you in the stillness of the night. And, as the years drift on, you can never know what pride I shall take in your middle life—the very best age of all! After the luxuries and the eager gaieties and the vanities and the possessions and the hot strife for gain cease to be important, we return to very simple things. For then, sunset is at hand, and the peace of Home calls to us far more clearly than the roar of the outer world. The evening of life comes bearing its own lamp."

Her face had grown graver, but still was radiant. The Dead Man smiled as he said:

"Then, as a little old grandmother—a little old child whose bedtime is drawing near, I shall still

see you; happy to sit out in the sunlight of another day; asking no more of life than a few hours still to be spent with those you love;—telling your grandchildren how much more brightly the flowers used to blossom when *you* were young. —All that happens, happens again.

"And then, one glad day, glorified, radiant, young once more—divinely young,—you will come to us. And your mother and I shall take you in our arms again. Oh, what a meeting it will be! To *you,* many happy years away. To *us*, only a brief hour of waiting. We shall meet so perfectly then—the flight of Love to Love. And now," bending down once more and kissing her, "good-night, my own little girl."

She rose, half-dazzled by the brightness that filled her soul. Pausing to bury her face for a moment in the bowl of roses, she murmured:

"Dear, *dear* Oom Peter!"

Then, slowly, smilingly, she made her way up the stairs to her own room. The Dead Man's eyes followed her every light step. The Dead Man's hand was raised in unspoken benediction. Marta bustled in from the kitchen on her nightly round of window-locking and door-barring. As

she passed the big wall clock, she stopped, sighed right lugubriously, and proceeded to wind the ancient timepiece by the simple old-time process of drawing down its pulley chain.

"Poor old Marta!" said Peter Grimm quizzically, as she departed. "Every time she thinks of me, she winds my clock. We're not quite forgotten after all, it seems. Good-night, old friend! There are a few tears ahead of you. But there is plenty of sunshine beyond them."

He glanced about the room, his eyes resting at last on Willem's door in the gallery above. The door swung open, and Dr. McPherson appeared on the threshold. In one hand he held a candlestick. In the hollow of his right arm lay Willem, a Dutch patchwork bedquilt wrapped around him.

"All right, laddie," McPherson was saying in a voice whose softness would have amazed the Batholommeys. "Since you want so badly to sleep downstairs, you shall. The sofa by the fire is just as snug as your own bed. What Mistress Batholommey will say to my giving in to a sick little boy's whim, I don't know. But we don't care. Do we, Willem? And," he added, reaching the living-room and carrying the child across to the sofa, "if you want to be down here,

and if you won't be happy anywhere else, here you shall be."

He laid Willem gently on the couch and covered him with the quilt.

"How do you feel, now?" he asked.

"I'm sleepy," answered Willem. "It's good to be in this room. I'll sleep finely here. Could —could I have a drink of water, please?"

The doctor crossed to the sideboard. The ice-water pitcher was empty. McPherson took up a glass.

"I'll find you some," said he. "I suppose I'll never learn my way around the labyrinths of this old house. But if I can't get to the nearest faucet, I'll wake Marta and ask her to help me. Lie still. I'll be back in a minute."

He picked up the lighted candle again, and started off on his quest. As he left the room he passed close by Peter Grimm.

"Good-night, Andrew," said the Dead Man. "I'm afraid the world will have to wait a little longer for the Big Guesser. The secret you've delved for so long and so loudly was in your own hands this evening. And you didn't know what to do with it."

The doctor left the room without hearing him.

But Willem heard. Starting up on the couch, the boy cried:

"Oh, Mynheer Grimm! *Where* are you? I knew you were down here—That's why I wanted to come."

"Here I am," answered the Dead Man, moving forward into the range of the anxiously wandering blue eyes.

"Oh!" gleefully exclaimed the child. "I *see* you now! I *see* you now!"

"Yes? At last?"

"Oh, you've got your hat!" went on the boy excitedly. "It's off the peg. You're going!"

"Yes, Willem," replied the Dead Man. "I'm going."

"Need you go right away, Mynheer Grimm?" coaxed the child. "Can't you wait just a *little* while?"

"I'll wait for *you,* dear lad," returned Peter Grimm.

"Oh, can I go with you?" asked the boy in glad surprise. "Thank you, Mynheer Grimm! I couldn't find the way without you."

"Oh, yes, you could, Willem. God's signal light is the surest thing in all the universe. But I'll wait for you, just the same."

The boy's drowsiness, overcome for the moment by his sight of the Dead Man's loved face, had crept in upon him once more. He lay back on the couch with a happy little sigh.

And at once he was off in the wonder-aisles of dreamland—a dreamland full of circuses, of impossibly funny and friendly clowns, of street parade glories, of marvellous animals and thrilling equestrian feats.

" Sleep well," said Peter Grimm. " I wish you the very pleasantest of dreams a boy could have in *this* world."

The doctor's step sounded presently in the adjoining kitchen. As though awakened by it, Willem opened his eyes and sat up. The fever flush was gone from his cheeks, the fever glaze from his look. The lassitude that had weighted every joint in his sick little body had fled, to be replaced by a strange, glorious buoyancy.

With a glad shout, Willem sprang up and raced across the floor into Peter's Grimm's outstretched arms.

" *Huge moroche,* Mynheer Grimm ! " he cried. " Oh, I am *well!* I never was so well before. It's wonderful to be like this."

" You are happy, too ? "

"Oh! *Happy?* It's like school being over!"

"Good!" laughed Peter Grimm. "It will always be like that now. Come! Let's be off."

He lifted the exalted, eager boy lightly from the floor, and swung him to a perch on his shoulder.

"*Uncle Rat has come to town!*" sang Willem, too rapturously happy to keep still.

"Ha-*H'M!*" he and Peter Grimm chorused as they moved toward the door.

"'Uncle Rat has come to town,
To buy——'"

McPherson came in.

"Here's the water, Willem," he announced, going over to the couch. "I got it at last, after barking my shins over——"

He glanced at the sofa and its occupant. Then the glass fell from his nerveless hand. He knelt in horror beside the still, white little body that lay there.

"Dead!" gasped McPherson.

"No!" exulted Peter Grimm from the doorway. "Not *dead*, Andrew, old friend. There never was so fair a prospect for *life!*"

"Oh," sighed Willem blissfully, his arm about Peter Grimm's neck, "I'm *so* happy! I didn't

know any one could be so happy as this—or so *well.*"

"If only the rest of them knew what they are missing! Hey, Willem?" assented Peter Grimm.

"What is Dr. McPherson looking at there on the sofa?" demanded Willem. "He seems scared—and—and—unhappy. *What* is he looking at, Mynheer Grimm?"

"He is looking at—*nothing.* And he doesn't know it. Come!"

"It's—it's so wonderful to be *alive!*" cried Willem.

They passed out, and the door of the house closed noiselessly behind them.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE DAWNING

NIGHT had given place to red dawn, and red dawn to white day.

Dr. McPherson came out of the Grimm house and sat down on the edge of the vine-bordered stoop. He was very tired. He had had a hard and trying night. In his ears were still ringing the sobs of old Marta, hastily awakened to learn of her only grandson's death;—Kathrien's quiet grief;—Mrs. Batholommey's excited, high-pitched questionings that jangled on the death hush as horribly as breaks the Venus music through the Pilgrims' Chorus.

It had been a night of stark wakefulness, of a myriad details. And McPherson had borne the brunt of it all. Now, under an opiate, Marta was asleep. Mrs. Batholommey had trotted ponderously home to bear the black tidings of a prisoned child's Release to her husband. And Kathrien had gone to her own room under the doctor's gruff command to snatch an hour's rest. McPherson himself had come out into the cool and fresh-

ness of the new-born world for a breathing space, and to think.

The June day was young. Very young. Under the early sun the grass was afire with dew diamonds. The flowers, dripping and fragrant, held up their cups to the light. The town still lay asleep. Over the suburb brooded the Hush of the primal Wilderness, creeping back furtively and momentarily to its long-lost domain.

And presently the quiet was broken by the swift recurring click of heels on the sidewalk. Some one was coming along the slumbrous Main street; and coming with nervous haste. The steps turned in at the Grimm gate. McPherson raised his blood-shot, sleep-robbed eyes and stared crossly toward the newcomer.

It was Frederik Grimm. And, recognising him, McPherson's frown deepened into a scowl.

"Is it true?" asked Frederik as he stopped in front of the doctor. "I met Mrs. Batholommey. She was just passing the hotel on her way home. I hadn't been able to sleep, so I was starting out for a walk. She told me——"

"That Willem's dead?" finished McPherson, with brutal frankness. "Yes, it's true. Did you suppose that it was a new vaudeville joke?"

Frederik stood blinking, blank-faced, apparently failing to grasp the sense of the doctor's words. The younger man's aspect dully irritated McPherson.

"Yes," he reiterated, "the boy's dead. The problem of supporting him needn't bother you now. Not that it ever did. He's dead. And it's the luckiest thing that ever happened to him."

Frederik raised one hand in instinctive protest. But he might as well have sought to stem Niagara with a straw.

The doctor's strained nerves, his genuine grief, his dislike for the dapper young man before him, combined to open wide the floodgates of honest Scottish wrath. And he saw no cause to exercise self-control.

"You're in luck!" he growled. "The law could have compelled you to pay some such munificent sum as four dollars a week for his maintenance. You're safe from that now. And I congratulate you. It'll mean an extra weekly quart of champagne or a brace of musical comedy seats for you. The law is stringent and I was going to invoke it in your case. You smashed a decent girl's life. You helped bring a nameless boy into

a world that would have made his life a hell as long as he lived. Just because his father happened to be a yellow cur. And, in penalty for that sin, the power and majesty of an outraged law would have assessed you about one per cent of your yearly income. You're lucky."

Frederik winced as though he had been lashed across the face.

"I sometimes wonder," continued McPherson, urged to fresh vehemence by sight of the effect he was scoring, "if hell holds a worse criminal or a more mercilessly punished one than the man or woman who lets a little child suffer needlessly—who *makes* it suffer. And of all the suffering that can be heaped upon a child, everything else is like a feather's weight compared to sending it out in life with a name such as Willem would have borne. Oh, but God's merciful when He finds little children crying in the dark and leads them Home! Batholommey and the rest of them sneer at me for sticking to the old hell-fire Calvin doctrines in these days of pew-cushion religion. But I tell you, in all reverence, if there's no hell for the people who torture children, then it's time the Almighty turned awhile from pardoning sinners and built one."

"Don't worry," said Frederik shortly. "There is one. I know. I am in it."

"'Mourner's bench talk,' eh? It's cheap. Penitence is always on the free list. And in your case, as in most, it comes too late to do any good, except to salve the penitent's feelings. Willem lived in the same house with you for three years. All around him was Love. Except from the one person whose sacred duty it was to give that Love. We pitied him. We knew what he'd be facing if he lived. We made his childhood as happy as we could, so that he'd have at least one bright thing to look back on afterward. He was nothing to any of us. Except that he was a child crippled and maimed and fore-damned for life in the worst way any Unfortunate could be. We pitied him and we loved him. Did he ever hear a harsh word or see a forbidding face? Yes; he did. From one person alone. From *you,* his father. Even last night when he crept downstairs parched with thirst, and begged you for a drink of water——"

"Don't!" cried Frederik, in sharp agony. "Do you suppose you can tell *me* anything about that? Do you suppose I haven't gone over it all—yes, and over all the three years—a hundred times

since I heard he was dead? Do you think you can make me feel it any more damnably than I do? If so, go ahead and try. You spoke of the need for a hell. You can spare your advice to the Almighty. He has made one. And I can't even wait until I'm dead before I walk through it."

"Through it," assented McPherson sardonically. "*Through* it with many a lamentable groan and a beating of the breast, and with squeaky little wails of remorse—and on *through* it, out onto the pleasant slopes of forgetfulness and new mischief. Take my condolences on your fearful passage through your purgatory. I fear me it will take you the best part of a week to pass entirely out of it. It's only a man-built hell, that of yours. And, according to the modern theologians, God has no worse one for you later on."

With twitching, pallid face, and anguished eyes, Frederik Grimm looked dumbly at his tormentor. Even in his agony, he felt, subconsciously, far down in his atrophied soul, that the doctor's forecast as to the duration of his remorse's torture was little exaggerated.

Yet, for the moment, his "man-built hell" was grilling and racking the stricken penitent to a point

that the Spanish Inquisition's ingenuity could never have devised.

McPherson, with a sombre satisfaction, noted the younger man's misery. Then a wistful look flitted across his gnarled, bearded face.

"I wonder," he mused, his angry voice sinking to a rumble, "I wonder if you can guess—and of course you can't—what a prize you spent eight years in throwing away. You had a son. And you disowned him and turned your back on him. I've had no son. I shall never have a son. And when I go out into the dark, there'll be no man-child to carry on my name. No lad to inherit this brute body of mine with all its strength and giant endurance; this brain of mine, that has tried so hard to perfect itself and to give its possible successor the faculty for thought and work and self-mastery. My father was a strong man, a great man. And much of the little power and goodness and worthiness that exist in me, I owe to him. No man in future years can say that of *me*. It must be something that no childless man can understand or dream of, to feel the fingers of one's little son tugging at one. To,—Lord! What would Mother Batholommey say if she could hear me maundering and havering

away like this! It means nothing to *you,* either. Except that you've had, and hated, and thrown away what many a better man would give half his life for."

There was a short silence. McPherson, ashamed of blurting his sacred heart secrets to a fellow he detested, sat gnawing angrily at his ragged grey moustache. Frederik, to whom the last part of the doctor's tirade had passed unheard, stood gazing sightlessly at the ground before him. And for a space, neither of them spoke.

At length Frederik looked up, almost timidly.

"Could—might I see him?" he asked.

"H'm?" grunted McPherson, starting from the maze of his own unhappy thoughts.

"I say, may I go in and see——?"

"Had three years to see him in, didn't you?" demanded McPherson. "I can't recall now that I ever saw you glance at him when you could help it. Why should you go in and see him now? You can't frighten him any more."

He checked himself.

"That last was a rotten thing for me to say," he muttered grudgingly. "I'm sorry."

But Frederik showed no signs of resentment.

He was looking moodily at the ground once more, apparently engrossed in the fruitless efforts of a red ant on the walk's edge to lug away a dead caterpillar forty times its size. The doctor peered at him almost apologetically from under his grey thatch of eyebrow. The younger man's face still wore that same blank, dazed mask, as though horror had wiped it clean of expression. Again it was Frederik who broke the silence.

"I remember once," said he, in a dreary monotone, "when he was four years old. He saw a woolly lamb in a shop window and wanted it. I'd lost ninety dollars that day at the races and I was sore. He begged me to buy him the lamb. It cost only a quarter. I wouldn't. I told him he ought to be content to sponge on me for food and clothes without wanting presents, too. I remember he cried when I pulled him away from the shop window. And I hit him. I wish—I wish I'd——"

"If there's anything worse than a hardened criminal," snorted McPherson, "it's a silly, sentimental one. You say you want to go in and see him? Go ahead then. You don't have to ask *my* leave. It's your own house, isn't it?"

"No," answered Frederik, "it isn't."

"Huh? Oh, I remember now. You said last night you were going to give it to Kathrien. Don't worry. A promise like that isn't binding in law. And you'll repent of it almost as soon as you'll stop repenting for Willem."

"Perhaps so," agreed Frederik. "But it will be too late then. Here," he went on, pulling a long envelope from his pocket, "take charge of this, will you, and give it to Kathrien for her signature in case I don't see her?"

"What is it?" asked McPherson, mechanically taking the envelope as Frederik thrust it into his hand.

"Before I went to the hotel for a room last night," answered the other, "I called on Colonel Lawton and got him to draw it up. All it lacks is her signature."

"What——?"

"It is a deed for the house and the twelve-acre 'home plot' it stands on. That includes the two cottages over on McIntyre Street. They're both rented and in good condition. They'll bring her in nearly eight hundred a year. It's less than my uncle would have left her if he'd known——"

"He knew," interrupted McPherson decisively. "And that's why you did it. As you said last

night, 'somebody has been doing your thinking for you.'"

"I'm glad for your own peace of mind that you aren't forced to give *me* credit for it," said Frederik in lifeless irony. "I'll go in now, if I may. I shall not stay long. And then for New York. It's the best place I know of for hastening one's journey through and out of the 'man-built hell' you spoke about. Oh, and I gave Lawton directions about Anne Marie, too. She can come home now if she wants to without being dependent upon any one for her support. You're quite right, Doctor. Somebody *has* been doing my thinking. I'm glad it stopped before I went broke."

With something of his old jaunty air he mounted the steps and went into the house. McPherson stared after him with a glower that somehow would not remain ferocious. Then he got up, stretched his great shaggy bulk, yawned, and started homeward for breakfast.

On the way he met Mr. Batholommey, hastily awakened and hurrying to the house of mourning.

"Doctor!" exclaimed the clergyman in agitation. "This is very distressing. *Very.*"

"As usual," drawled McPherson, "I find I

can't agree with you. To me it seems a blessed release."

"And on Kathrien's wedding day, too!" went on Mr. Batholommey, to whom McPherson's eternal disagreement had become so chronic he scarce noticed it. "At least, on the day that *was* to have been her wedding day! Young Hartmann waked me out of a sound sleep last night to tell me she had promised to marry him to-day. And he asked me to be at the house promptly at eleven. But, of course, now——"

"Of course, now," put in the doctor, "the wedding is going to take place just the same."

"But——!"

"I argued with Kathrien a whole half-hour this morning before she would agree to it," went on the doctor. "But at last I persuaded her it was the only thing to do. If ever she needs a husband's help and advice, now is the time. And at last I made her understand that. So, she and James will be married to-day. Just as they planned to. The only difference will be that they'll come to the rectory for the ceremony."

"It seems almost—shall I say indecorous?" protested Mr. Batholommey.

"The *real* things of life generally do," replied

the doctor. "Good-morning. I'm going to be so indecorous as to hurry home for a bath and a breakfast instead of catching cold standing out here on a wet street discussing other people's business."

He strode on. Mr. Batholommey, murmuring dazedly to himself, took up his own journey.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE GOOD-BYE

FREDERIK GRIMM turned away from looking down at the pathetically small figure in the darkened room. His face was expressionless. He had stood there but a few minutes. And his eyes, riveted on the still, white little form, had not softened nor blurred with tears.

Wearily he descended the gallery stairs into the living-room, where the morning sunlight was already turning the desk bowl of roses into a riot of burning colour.

He was halfway across the room, toward the door, when he was aware that Kathrien had risen from the desk chair and was looking at him. Her look was cold and devoid of pity as she surveyed him. But as he halted, hesitant, the sunlight fell full on his face. And in the visage that had seemed so vapidly blank to McPherson, she read much.

The cold glint died from her eyes and she stepped forward with hand outstretched.

"Frederik," she said gently.

He came haltingly toward her. He held out his hand to meet hers. But he could not touch the fingers that were waiting to press his own. His hand fell limply to his side.

She understood. And the warm pity in her face deepened.

"I am sorry," she said simply.

"He is happier," muttered the man.

"I don't mean for Willem. For *you*. You understand what it all means at last."

"And, too late," he assented. "It is always too late—when one understands."

"It is never too late," she denied eagerly. "Frederik, you have everything ahead of you. You can——"

"I have nothing ahead of me," he contradicted dully.

"You have wealth, youth, the power to undo what wrong you did,—to start afresh——"

"As the broken-winged bird has the power to start a new flight. Don't waste your divine sympathy on me, Kitty. It would be thrown away. In a very little time, as Dr. McPherson has kindly pointed out to me, I shall be convalescent from my attack of remorse. And then all life will lie before me, as you say. All

life except the one thing that makes life worth living."

He stopped. For he saw she understood.

"You always understood," he went on, voicing his thought. "That was one of the wonderful things about you, Kitty. Even now, you saw the pain I am in. And it made you forget what you believe I am. It was sweet of you. It will be good to remember."

"I wish I could help you," she said.

"You *have* helped me," he answered. "For you've given me a Memory to carry till I can shake off the load—till I can get clear of McPherson's 'man-built hell.' It won't be long. So don't worry. Even now, my common sense tells me I've made a fool of myself. And I'm human enough to be more ashamed of being a fool than of being a knave. I had everything in my own hands. And I threw away the game because an attack of fright kept me from playing my winning cards. Last night I was afraid of a ghost. This morning I'm sane enough to know that ghosts were invented by the first nervous man who was alone at night. This morning I am heartbroken because my little boy lies dead. To-morrow I shall be sane enough to know that it is as

lucky for me as it is for him, that he died. And in a week I'll be congratulating myself over it all and revelling in a freedom and a fortune I've always craved. So you see I'm quite incurable."

"Why do you say such things?" she cried. "You know they aren't true."

"When I said you 'always understand,' Kitty, I was wrong. You don't understand. No woman understands—that a man doesn't reform. A good man may have taken a wrong twist. And when he finds his way back to the straight road, they say he has 'reformed.' He hasn't. He's only struck his own natural gait again. As he was bound to. And *my* kind of man sometimes takes a momentary twist in the *right* direction. Then people say *he* has reformed. And they are just as much mistaken as they were in the other case. For, water won't run uphill after the first pressure is withdrawn."

"But in the fires of affliction——"

"The fires of affliction," he retorted sadly, "have burned away the dross from the pure gold of many a soul, I suppose. But no fires were ever heated that could burn dross fiercely enough to turn it into gold. Yet——"

He hesitated, then said, without daring to look at her:

"There's one thing I do want you to know, Kitty. Whatever I was and am, and whatever shams went to make up my daily life here—you know my love for *you* was true and absolute and that I loved and *love* you more than the whole world besides?"

"Yes," she returned, unembarrassed. "I believe that, Frederik. In part. You loved me as much as you could love any one. But——"

"Why must there be a 'but'?" he entreated.

"But," she went on with the relentlessness of the Young, "not as much as you loved yourself."

"More! Ten thousand times more!" he declared vehemently.

"No," she contradicted. "For you didn't love me enough to give me up when you knew I cared for another man. The Perfect Love would have——"

"The 'perfect love'!" he scoffed. "I have read of it. But I have yet to see it."

"You cannot see it," she replied, "for the same reason I could not see Oom Peter when he was fighting my battle here last night. My

eyes were blinded by the world I live in. Perfect love is everywhere. It is within and about us. But——"

"But I would be too ignoble to recognise it if I chanced upon it? Perhaps. But why strip me of my last illusion? In the torment of my self-abasement this morning, I have clung to that one comfort: That I love you with a love which a truly worthless man *could* not feel. And now——"

"*Don't* misunderstand me," she begged, half-tearfully. "I——"

"You have shown me the truth. And I ought to thank you for it. Perhaps some day I can. If I still remember it then. Good-bye, dear. I shan't be here again. I've—I've left you a little present. Dr. McPherson will give it to you."

"But I *can't* take——"

"Oh, yes, you can. It isn't really from me. That's just another of my lies to make a good impression. I've gotten so in the habit of telling them that it is going to take me a long time to realise that one of the chief advantages of being a rich man is the immunity from the need to lie. The present isn't really from me. It's from Oom

Peter. You can't refuse it from *him*. If you doubt it's Oom Peter's own direct gift, ask Dr. McPherson. It was bad enough," he sighed, in mock despair, " for Oom Peter to squander so much of my money while he was alive, without keeping on doing it after he died. I hope he has stopped it at last. Or I'll soon be reduced to standing at the subway steps with a tin cup in my hand."

Through the forced lightness, whose effort wrung sweat from the man's forehead, Kathrien was woman enough to see the mortal agony that lay beneath. And again she held out her hand.

" Good-bye, Frederik," she said gently. " And may you be happy! "

He looked doubtfully at the shapely little hand. Then, with an awkwardness strangely foreign to his normal grace, he took the hand in both his own and stood a moment, looking down at it as though not knowing what to do with it.

Then, very simply, he fell on his knees, touched the warm, roseleaf palm to his lips, got up and, without looking back, hurried out of the house.

Kathrien watched his slender, carefully groomed figure until it was lost at a turn in the

rose bushes. Then she came back into the room and stood beside Peter Grimm's old chair.

"Oom Peter!" she whispered. "This is my wedding day. You know it, don't you? And —oh, please let me think you are close—*close*—beside me all the time!"

THE END